

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Mark 10:2-16

Year B - Proper 22, Text: Mark 10:2-16
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In Mark's Gospel, Jesus leaves Galilee in 10:1 and enters Jerusalem for the first time in 11:1.

Verse 10:1: Some manuscripts omit the word “and” after the phrase “the region of Judea” (10:1). However, Judea was not “beyond the Jordan” — these are two different places.

As Jesus travels south toward Jerusalem, crowds flock to Him and He teaches them. It is important to note that the Gospels make few references to Jesus preaching, but many, many references to Him teaching. The church today has much to learn from Jesus' strategy and methodology.

Verse 10:2: Some Pharisees join the crowd and, to test Jesus, ask Him, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” Possibly, they were recalling that Herod the Great had divorced his first wife, Doris, and married Mariamne I (whom he later had put to death). And Herodias divorced her husband Philip so that she might marry Philip's brother, Herod Antipas.

Perhaps the Pharisees are attempting to discredit Jesus by asking a question that He would have to answer to the dissatisfaction of some of those present. Perhaps the question is intended to be the first of a series of questions, or else is an attempt to get Jesus' view on a current rabbinic dispute.

The Pharisees are inquiring about an obvious matter as it stands in the Jewish Law. Deuteronomy 24:1 states that a man may divorce his wife if he finds her to be “objectionable.” The meaning of this OT passage was hotly debated in Jesus' day.

Verses 10:3-4: Jesus puts an end to their parrying with Him by asking them to quote a Mosaic text. They cite the privilege of a Jewish male to end his marriage by issuing his wife a certificate of dismissal and divorce. The wife is therefore put away and freed from any further obligation with regard to him.

The Jewish notion from Moses' time was that both

parties were then free to remarry. If the question underlying the Pharisees' challenge was the interpretation of the phrase “something objectionable” (Deuteronomy 24:1), Mark suppresses it and focuses on the larger matter of what Jesus had to say about divorce.

Verse 10:5: Jesus rejects the notion that Moses' words had anything to do with “male privilege” — the view generally embraced by Jewish men. He states that the issue at stake is the hardheartedness of male Jews, and relief for Jewish women.

Verses 10:6-9: Jesus reminds the Pharisees how things were meant to be with the human race from the beginning of time. The original divine intent was *monogamy* — a monogamy so binding that a couple are no longer two creatures but one. And because after marriage a husband and wife are no longer two but “one flesh,” this unity brought about by God is not to be terminated by human will.

Verses 10:10-12: The disciples seek clarification from Jesus. If the essence of adultery is turning away from one's only spouse, by logic, a second spouse would constitute adultery. Jesus takes the law at face-value. Divorce is not what God intended, even though it may be allowed under the law.

Jesus indicated that a Jewish man sinned against his spouse by taking another partner — something that Jewish interpretation had overlooked (remember the patriarchs and kings of the Old Testament who had more than one wife). Furthermore, the same guilt is incurred by a woman who repudiates her husband — a second innovation.

In the first century world, divorce was so widespread that some women were hesitant to marry on the grounds of marital insecurity; they could so easily be cheated on and abandoned. Jesus' call to fidelity was, however, more than a moral challenge. He desired that men and women should see marriage as a mystical

union, unbreakable because God Himself “hath joined together.” This is the Christian ideal, and its fulfillment, as in all harmonious relationships, is as rewarding as it is demanding.

Consider these additional remarks by Dr. John B. King, Jr. on the parallel text from Matthew:

From the parallel passage, Matthew 19:3-9, it is clear that Jesus agrees with Moses in regard to divorce. Moses says: “When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some indecency (*erwat dabar* = nakedness of a thing = uncleanness = immorality) in her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house... (Deuteronomy 24:1). In Matthew 19:9 (not in Mark) Jesus says: “whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality (*porneia* = immorality = uncleanness), and marries another, commits adultery.”

In Matthew, Jesus clarifies what is meant in the Old Testament by “uncleanness.” The only legitimate ground for divorce is *porneia* (the same word from which we derive “pornography”). In both the Old and New Testaments, the legitimate grounds for divorce is a matter of grave immorality.

What Jesus opposes in Matthew 19 is not the Mosaic law but rather the attempt of contemporary interpreters to twist this law to allow divorce for trifling reasons. They ask Jesus if it is OK for a man to divorce his wife for *any* reason, implying that Moses favored lax divorce when he never did! This shows that there is much continuity between the New and Old Testaments in regard to ethics. It is false to assume that the New Testament simply and everywhere supersedes the Old.

Mark 10:13-16

Verse 10:13: Jesus is asked to touch some children brought to Him by their parents. The parents do not ask Jesus to heal or exorcise the children, only to bless them. The disciples react sharply, thinking perhaps that Jesus will be annoyed by the parents’ requests, or that He would prefer privacy.

Verse 10:14: Jesus responds (with some indignation) that the disciples should change their attitude completely! No one should stop little children who want to come to Him — perhaps for a hug! He welcomes little children into His kingdom.

Verse 10:15: Even more, adults need to come to Him in the same spirit as do little children! If they do not, they will exclude themselves from membership in God’s Kingdom.

Verse 10:16: Jesus embraces the children, lays His hands on them (no doubt, their heads), and blesses them.