

Sermon for Pentecost 19 proper 22
Title: Ground zero number one.
Text: Mark 10:2-16

Introduction: "You want answers?"
"I want the truth!"

"You can't handle the truth!*

Everyone know the line? It's one of the most famous movie quotes of all time from "A Few Good Men." Who can forget image of Col. Jessup being led out of the courtroom, a fine lesson in one needs clarity as well as passion. He let his zeal for the mission override the clarity of his oath. Last week I mentioned how there are several subjects that we as Christians need to understand clearly. We need to not only know what we believe but why we believe it. So from time to time I will be preaching to you what I will call 'ground zero' sermons.

You know what ground zero is, that's the spot where there's a crater, there's rubble and fallout and people wandering around wondering what in the world just happened. We need to know clearly why things are the way they are. We need to know what Christ says, and what Scripture says and hence what the church says, not just lately but has always said.

And one of the biggest craters where Christian's are wandering around muttering to themselves is marriage, relationships, gender roles in the U.S. The root of the trouble we are in as far as same gender marriage, GLBT rights and so on began to grow several decades ago in what was called the sexual revolution. In that revolution we saw better forms of contraception, combined with a change in how people viewed sex outside of marriage. What the Bible describes as adultery, (Heb. 13:4, Titus 2:11-12, 1Cor. 6:18) and impurity was seen as a means of liberating oneself from the shackles of conventional morals and ethics. What our catechism describes as 'God's gift of marriage,' was viewed as 'God's harsh restrictions of marriage.'" Over time sex only within the bounds of marriage was turned into a means of oppressing and repressing one's passion and desire, after all, why should we be kept from something that is so good?

But like most things that are done only for the sake of satisfying our desires, sex outside of marriage is not where things began and ended. Because this same selfish attitude that marriage is for the gratification of the individual began to corrupt the institution of marriage from the inside out. It was inevitable that divorce would increase when personal gratification and the fulfilling of individual needs became the primary reason for marriage. And with the rise of divorce, and the continual search for personal gratification, 'gender politics' became the way things are done. With it came the notion that nobody can tell me or force me to do anything I don't want to do-and that includes God and his church.

Well, what in the world does all that have to do with Caitlyn Jenner? A whole lot. The point at which we as Christians were forced to defend marriage as between one man and one woman was also the point at which we had to face an unpleasant argument. Our own misdeeds and the misdeeds we turned a blind eye to came back to haunt us. People who were in favor of same gender marriage shot back with 'how can you say that we're going to destroy the institution of marriage? Haven't the heterosexuals done

that already? What will gay marriage do that hasn't been done already? You gotta admit they had a point, even if we didn't like it very much.

We've had the attitude of 'whatever is done between two consenting adults is no one's business but theirs' for so long that we tend to have treated it as if it were holy writ. And so one of the consequences of ignoring God's command, (1Cor. 6:9-10, Rom. 1:24, 26-27) and God's order (Gen. 1:27, 2 Gen. 2:24-25, Mark 6:6-9) is to be left without the means to defend yourself when enough is enough, when you're backed into a corner because no one is leaving what's done between two consenting adults behind closed doors anymore, it's now political, it's legal, it's codified.

This attitude that normalizes sin didn't happen overnight; 20 years ago I was a residence counselor on a Christian college campus, trying to set college students straight, because they thought that all of the restrictions to sexual immorality found under 'Thou shalt not commit adultery' didn't apply to them because they weren't married. Back in 1995 parents were letting their daughter's boyfriends stay overnight in the same room because 'we know where they are.' Christians are now in the weak situation of saying to the homosexuals and the transgendered that our sins are normal because we're heterosexual but your sins are not because those sins gross us out!

Gender has mattered since God created us male and female, it has always mattered, whether anyone wanted to respect God's order or not. But we let it all pass because of the code language 'they're in a loving committed relationship.' And the Christians say 'oh yeah I guess you're right I don't want to be mean about this.' Never mind what God said (1Cor. 6:18). How can we live as if the rudimentary teachings of God's word don't matter to us, but then turn around and apply them to someone else who maybe doesn't even know about Christ? How do we expect the codes of our country to reflect the so called "Judeo-Christian" ethic if we're not interested in living under it anyway, or we don't even know what they are?

There can only be one reason, what is more important to us than anything else (even as Christians even as those who know Christian doctrine) is the idea that 'nobody can tell me or force me to do anything I don't want to do.' And that, my friends, is a danger to faith and the church and society.

"But Pastor, even the Bible made allowances for divorce." Yes God did that. And yet here in the Gospel of Mark Jesus is critical of a permissive attitude toward divorce and sexual immorality. And when we hear '*Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and send her away.*' That is not a matter of God saying 'alright alright, I know you're going to do this anyway, so I guess I'll make it legal now.' It's not God saying 'well at least you're in a committed relationship.' It's not God caving in to sin. It is God seeing how hard hearted men (and women) are, and making a *law to prevent greater harm*. Before the rule given by Moses, men could divorce their wives easily and need little to no reason for it.

The consequence of frivolous divorce was that women were left destitute and ruined because of their husband's selfishness. The law was to protect both the people involved and the institution of marriage. It protected both men and women from mistreatment and abuse. Proof had to be provided, testimony had to be heard and the grounds for divorce had to be greater than 'I'm attracted to someone else.' God was re-enforcing the His instruction that the union between man and woman was His institution not some government office somewhere. And along with the need for reasons based in reality for

a letter of divorce, there was the resultant opening up and making public the dispute, wherein the elders and the religious leadership would have an opportunity to guide the couple toward reconciling.

Again, God did not look at an impossible situation and say 'okay since they won't ever change, I'm going to give my blessing to their behavior.' That's how we got in the mess we're in, by saying 'well they're gonna do it anyway, may as well make it legal.' No, God doesn't give permission for sin. He curbs it, so that it doesn't, or should I say didn't do what America has done to itself in the last 40 or so years. It's devastating. There isn't anyone here who hasn't had to deal with the pain of divorce. It's worse than having a spouse or a parent die. It puts stress on kids that they weren't meant to have. It corrupts the building blocks of a healthy society.

Sometimes it is necessary. Jesus did not expect a woman to stay with a man who beat her up and threatened her. Jesus did not expect a faithful spouse to have to endure the disgrace and pain of an unrepentant serial adulterer as a mate. Jesus didn't expect that a man or woman should not be able to re-marry if their spouse abandons them, or refuses to support them. I know these things happen too. I know they're hard to live through and even harder to heal. And what you need to hear from me and from God is not more harsh words that cause you pain, but the promise of God's healing, love and grace.

And you will have it. "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child will not enter it.' It is no coincidence that Jesus speaks of the foundation of society-marriage and then refers to the offspring of the union of man and wife. The image of man and woman is also the image of Christ and His Church. Through the hearing of the Gospel which is given to the church Christ's bride, more little ones come, helpless and needy seeking the embrace of their heavenly Father, through His son, the head of the church.

God desires to receive each of us this way, so that he may bless us. For there is another kind of adultery, and that is when we are separated from God and follow after all the things that do us no good, but we desire so badly this is called idolatry when anything or creature is treated as we would treat the one true God. The Lord indeed understands the pain and the loss of broken relationships and wounds caused when what God puts together is torn in two. He felt that with His own people, whom He loved, saved and gave a new home. Often Israel was called to repent after her seeking false gods, trying to mix their lust with their love for Love for the Lord. We too must we be called back to turn to our Lord and there we will find that firm foundation of God being the creator, the redeemer and comforter. There we will find that God's order brings lasting peace. We are reborn by faith and being reborn we are brought into the fellowship of that bride, of that lady the church. Always subordinate to the one who bought us back from sin death and the devil.

The Lord still calls us His children. He comes to us, calling us through His word, through our Baptisms to drown the old man/woman in the water and emerge reborn. He calls with His word, us to be children of the heavenly father. He feeds us with His body and Blood. He takes us in his arms, like a mother holds a baby and feeds him. God wants to lay all of who we are, what we have done, and failed to do, all of our rebellion all of our anger, our resentment, all of our guilt at his feet so that He may give us his righteousness which brings the peace that is beyond human understanding.

The truth can be hard to handle sometimes. And the truth is that when we lose the foundation of family the whole of our society is affected. The truth is the culture will change when we change and are salt and light in this sin darkened world. The truth also as our Lord said 'will set you free.' The truth that Christ willingly suffered and died to end the great separation between God and man. The truth that He can and He will forgive every sin that you bring to Him. The truth, that though no one can say 'I have not sinned in thought word and deed,' Christ the Lord your Savior still desires to take you into His arms and bless you with forgiveness, which brings peace and joy. Will that make all our other relationships perfect? No. But he does give us the clarity of a firm foundation, which guards and guides our days and deeds in His peace. He does give us a new love, a love that is anchored not in desire, but in sacrifice for you. The mercy of God, which is His undeserved favor, also brings the Power of the Gospel to see that what God puts together is not a terrible burden, but a great gift in which we are blessed. Marriage is a gift. Two people, one flesh, one life. God bless marriage among us and help us to keep it pure.
Amen.