

Sermon – Mark 10:2-16
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Grace Lutheran Church
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“Building the Cross+Gen Kingdom”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name of God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. “How much sin can I get away with and still go to heaven?” That’s the question posed by the magnet on my in-laws’ refrigerator. We may not include that last clause all the time, but it seems that we’re always asking the question. How much can I get away with? Although they never verbalize the question in quite this way, this mindset seems to drive my children’s behavior; they constantly see just how far they can push it, how far they can push me. Most days I feel like I should be wearing a black-and-white-striped shirt with a referee’s whistle hanging around my neck. How much can I get away with? Is it allowed? Is it legal? Questions of the law have been hanging heavily in the air this week. How should armed police officers respond in what they perceive to be dangerous situations, and how should they be judged? Who should be allowed to sit on the Supreme Court, sitting in judgment over others? These are questions of extreme importance, generating deep and valid emotions. Many of you, I know, experienced a wide range of emotions and reactions over the past few days; I did, too. What is allowed, what is legal, what should or shouldn’t be permissible? These questions matter. And when people or situations fall short, justice is required. What should not be allowed *should not be allowed*. Period. And when such standards are not met – when we fail or when other people fail us, when the system breaks down, the pain we feel is incredibly real and raw.

2. When it comes to ordering our own lives, however, the problem is in the perspective. How much can I get away with? Is it legal? Not bad questions, but when it comes to ordering our lives, they are questions asked from the wrong direction. This is the problem with the question of the Pharisees this morning: “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” It’s a question that makes us squirm a little bit in our pews, as we wonder what the preacher will say about both the Pharisees’ question and Jesus’ answer. So let’s get that out of the way. There won’t be any hellfire and brimstone this morning, no carrying on about the sad state of morality today, no shaming of those who have lived through divorce, no implying that people suffering in an abusive marriage should stay married because divorce is wrong. Neither will there be a blasé embracing of the idea that divorce is okay, that marriage is malleable contract or a mere human construct. I mean, divorce is a painful reality and clearly not what is intended by God in the creation of marriage or by us when we enter into marriage. I’ve officiated dozens and dozens of weddings, and no bride or groom has ever said to me, “I sure hope this works out.” In spite of evidence to the contrary, people expect it to work out because they believe it should. And when it doesn’t, it’s painful. As a child of divorce, I know this all too well. And I also know that my parents aren’t much better or worse than most other people; I know that they’re still beloved children of God, and that their divorce doesn’t change that fact. Divorce was legal in Jesus’ day, and it’s legal now. Divorce isn’t a good thing, but it’s sometimes necessary. And those who have experienced divorce aren’t generally any better or worse than the rest of us, and their particular brokenness is just as forgiven as mine. The pain of divorce is incredibly real. So, too, is the healing offered by our God in the midst of and after this pain.
3. Of course, at this point I haven’t really said too much. Nothing that you didn’t already know, anyway. And speaking of pain, not having said very much is a painful thing for a preacher to admit! Because the truth of the matter is, the question of whether or not it’s legal to get divorced is just another way of

asking, “How much can I get away with?” And that’s not much of a question on which to base our relationships. A successful marriage is much, much more than simply avoiding divorce, and a faithful life is much, much more than getting away with the bad we do. This is why Jesus tightens the screws today, holding us to a higher standard. For one thing, divorce had different consequences in Jesus’ day; if a man divorced a woman, she would lose her social and economic status. It would ruin her. And since Jesus, oddly enough, cares about women, he doesn’t want that to happen. And this begins to point us in the right direction. Rather than enabling breaks and fractures in our relationships, Jesus encourages us, commands us, to cling more closely to one another. Moving beyond married relationships, this applies to each of us in all of our relationships. What can we get away with? What is legal? Those are questions that get us no further than the bare minimum. In response to the God who gives everything to us, to the Christ who gave everything for us, why would we want to live bare-minimum lives?

4. And so it is that Jesus – again! – puts a child in our midst today. If you want to live a Kingdom life, you don’t start with the cold calculations of an adult; you start with the faith of a child, with wonder and excitement and trust. *With the faith of a child.* Jesus calls us into community with one another – in marriages, yes, but also as one family of faith – so that we can do so much more than the bare minimum, so much more than simply that which is allowed. We are called to invest our God-given, Christ-shaped selves in one another, starting with the littlest among us. We encourage and learn from the wonder of the child and invest in her the wisdom of the elder, growing deeper in faith together as we go. Jesus calls us to not only *not* tear apart our relationships, but to join ever more closely together. Whether we are married or single, old or young, whatever hurt or pain we’ve endured, God has knit us together in Christ; may nothing tear us asunder. Christ has created us to be a Cross+Gen community, in which all generations, all ages and stages, come together with the cross in the middle of it all. And when that happens, what

can God not do with us? So much more than the bare minimum. And so we teach faith to the children so that the children can teach us what faith means.

5. Yesterday, owing to an odd confluence of events, I was called into service to coach the Golden Dragons, Anders' soccer team. We won 1-0. When we got into the car after the game, Anders said, "That was pretty good, Dad. I thought you were going to be a horrible coach." I didn't dare ask him why he had such low expectations. But I did think about what I did well, which was basically making sure that the kids were in the right spots at the start of each quarter and then yelling encouragement, trusting the kids to take it from there. In the cross of Christ, God has put us in the right spots. With God's encouragement, what can't we do – in our lives, our marriages, our households no matter what shape they take, in our church, our city, our world? As children of God, forgiven for our worst and freed for God's best, we will not only receive the Kingdom of God. We just might make this broken world look a little bit more like the Kingdom of God. And that's something worth trying to get away with. Amen.

And now may the peace that passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.