

Pastor Roy's Sermon from Oct. 7, 2012

Readings: Numbers 2:18-24, Ps. 8, Hebrews 1:1-4;2:5-12

Children's lesson:

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I think it's interesting that Jesus speaks of children in terms of receiving the kingdom but never uses divorce as a limitation for participation in the kingdom. He makes in this text a blanket statement about divorce and adultery, but I'm sure that is more in reference to the violence of leaving a wife to return "in shame" to her parents while the greedy selfish man keeps the children and property and remarries. And the divorce passages are usually traps to test Jesus. Jesus chose to talk about children as examples of the kingdom. More simple trust, less morality and power as authority.

I might focus on Hebrews, which is curiously befuddled at points, and verses 9, 10 on Jesus being perfected by suffering. Interesting that the writer just assumes that the psalms are the words of Jesus. Also that our unity with Christ is in our shared humanity and that we stand with Christ together before God as brothers and sisters. That's cool. I think sometimes we make too much of a separate category of Jesus' Godness. If we're not sure what precisely to do with his Godness, we should take strong courage in our shared humanity and leave the rest to history and the wisdom of God.

Genesis 2 illustrates marriage at its best—a relationship of unity and complementary partnership. Two as one flesh. Two as one force in the world. One flesh is not domination or agreement in all things. In a healthy marriage gifts are shared, and nurtured--given room to grow. Newness and growth brings joy for both. One flesh is a relationship created by two who entrust their future to one another. One flesh is two souls choosing each day to come back, to trust the relationship—the one flesh. If the one flesh, the relationship of the two souls becomes unsteady, if a void begins to grow, it must be nurtured back to health, trust restored. Trust can be restored if both partners are willing to nurture the one relationship of one flesh.

I oversaw a wedding a few weeks ago and the sermon was brief. But I repeatedly mentioned the importance of listening to the health of their marriage. At one point, I stopped in mid sentence—I looked at both, Nicole filled in the blank, “Listening.” I went on. A minute later, I paused briefly and looked at Kurt, with no response—he was nervous—at which point I told Kurt that the sermon would never end unless he filled in the blank with the right word. At the next pause, he gladly answered, “Listen!” I reminded him that we guys sometimes have the hardest time listening. We have to work on listening—to make it a habit—the habit of nurturing one flesh. A willing partner can learn to listen. A willing partner can gently teach.

Practicing careful listening illustrates the reality that maturity comes through struggle, often through suffering. Seems every couple which has been married for a long time is quick to mention with or without prodding, that the journey has not been easy, but well worth it. The greatest accomplishments in life require the greatest effort—marriage and friendship, raising children, developing a career, a vocation.

The writer of Hebrews speaks of Christ's unity with the Father and his unity with us. The shared partnership between Christ and his Father is revealed in Jesus' trust in God clear to the end. This unity, too, was perfected—brought to full maturity in Jesus' suffering and death. Death overcome by a Holy Resurrection is the missing piece of the puzzle of life that is our hope. We can extend trust to a partner, to a friend, or a neighbor because Jesus revealed that nothing can threaten the power of love, the power of sight to the blind, freedom to the captive, true riches to those caught in oppressive poverty. Jesus let it all go for love, and then it all came back to him. It always does. Not maybe in the way we would like or expect, but nothing offered to God is ever lost.

Resurrection is a strong part of the essential mystery of our faith—as rich and integral as life and death; but his life was not lost when he gave it up for love. So it is for us when we extend grace, mercy, forgiveness, trust. . . to a partner for life who values the one flesh or even to an enemy. It takes faith to invest in another person, to offer one's trust as a sacred gift, to wait patiently.

Perhaps this is why Mark holds Jesus' teaching about the tragedy of divorce which is thrown at him as a cynical test—he holds it side by side with his intentional teaching about welcoming children. The arrogance of wealthy, powerful men toward divorce and the economic and emotional hardship into which their abandoned wives were cast—these are contrast with the simplicity and powerlessness of children. Note that Jesus never says that the kingdom of God is made up of those who stay married. But he honestly warns that divorce brings great brokenness and pain. Jesus may have never intentionally set out to teach about divorce, but he did intentionally use children as an example of faith.

Who is greatest in the Kingdom? Whom should we welcome into the Kingdom? Who is the essence of the Kingdom? Wisdom is found not by instilling fear, exerting influence, and struggling to control, but in tenderly offering one's trust, cultivating gifts in others, waiting patiently for the small seeds of the kingdom to grow into mighty trees of wisdom and peace—most of which we never see during our lifetime. Prayer in patience-building silence. Meditation which clears the underbrush and clutter of our hearts and subconscious minds. These create space for us to welcome one another and listen to one another. Our own frustrations and limitations diminish as we make room for one another.

God give us courage to do just that. Then we will know hope and joy. Thanks be to God. Amen.