

Pastor Roy's Sermon from October 7, 2018

Mark contrasts two of Jesus' teachings in today's gospel reading. Jesus' opponents try to stump him with the law on divorce. Jesus does not deny the law but reminds them that one who seeks to abuse and oppress a spouse through divorce is violating the law of God's peace and justice rather than living in it. Divorce is a tragedy, not an opportunity. Jesus is pointing out that law helps guide us in faithfulness. It appears that some treated the Law in the Old Testament like we do tax law today. The better you know it, the more advantage you have, the less taxes you pay, especially if you have plenty. The religious leaders had turned the law into a point of advantage over others. Jesus' words about divorce and adultery are quite realistic and reflect the deep pain of divorce. Though Jesus mentions men and women, Jesus' main focus is on men because in his day, they had the most power and legal advantage over women. It is often still true today.

Jesus invites us to take a long look at the hard heart. Part of repenting and believing in the good news is openness and honesty about ourselves. How is my heart hardened and cynical?

Then he brings in the lesson of the child for contrast. Sure, children are smart, and when they see an opportunity, they can work it to their advantage. But children are open, they are learning, they are listening to and watching everyone around them and still forming opinions. Children tend to be more trusting, not cynical. Meanwhile, adults tend to have very complicated and hard to pin down reasons for liking certain people and disliking others, or any decision that we make. It's complicated. Children tend to be pretty straightforward when they make judgments. They are also often filled with wonder. They haven't yet learned to ignore the beauty and amazing details of this planet and universe.

This is one of those teachings that we all should probably sit with for a while. To allow the example of children to lodge in our heads and ferment. How am I like a child? How might I become more open, more listening, more welcoming, less convinced that "the other people" are wrong and I and mine are right? I'm not saying it's easy, but necessary if we would like to be free with a growing edge as Jesus calls us by these teachings.

Put simply, another way of putting this lesson in contrast is that Jesus and Mark are showing us a standard of emotional and spiritual health. Are we open or closed to God and life? Have we already decided what needs to happen for us to

be satisfied? Are we listening and watching for new revelations, new experiences, new opportunities to live into the love of God?

Change is all around us. But so is opportunity. May we greet change as opportunity. Not with anxious weariness, but with childlike wonder in the ever new promise of the life and eternal presence of God? Amen.