



TOUCH POINT

God is a Divorcee – Touchpoint for September 29, 2021

Mark 10:2-12 (MSG) ¹⁻² From there he went to the area of Judea across the Jordan. A crowd of people, as was so often the case, went along, and he, as he so often did, taught them. Pharisees came up, intending to give him a hard time. They asked, “Is it legal for a man to divorce his wife?”

³ Jesus said, “What did Moses command?” ⁴ They answered, “Moses gave permission to fill out a certificate of dismissal and divorce her.” ⁵⁻⁹ Jesus said, “Moses wrote this command because of your hardness of heart.

In the original creation, God made male and female to be together. Because of this, a man leaves father and mother, and in marriage he becomes one flesh with a woman—no longer two individuals, but forming a new unity. Because God created this organic union of the two sexes, no one should desecrate his art by cutting them apart.”

¹⁰⁻¹² When they were back home, the disciples brought it up again. Jesus gave it to them straight: “A man who divorces his wife so he can marry someone else commits adultery against her. And a woman who divorces her husband so she can marry someone else commits adultery.”

Grace and peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

“Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, “Is it legal for a man to divorce his wife?” and Jesus answered, “Because of your hardness of heart Moses wrote this commandment for you.”

OK, let's see how the divorced preacher handles this one!

As I looked at different commentaries on this passage, I kept hearing about what a difficult passage this is for the pastor to preach on because there will be divorced people in the pews and, in our case, in the pulpit.

And I had to ask myself, why? Why is this passage more difficult than other passages that deal with sin and brokenness? When Jesus talks about money and riches as a hindrance to entering the Kingdom, why isn't that a difficult passage to deal with for a pastor? After all, I assume people in the pews have money... When Jesus talks against judging others, why isn't that a difficult passage? I'm going to assume we have all judged others...

Is this passage more difficult because the brokenness is public – a matter of public record? Is it because it can't be hidden – it is there for all to see? I'm not sure. But for all the divorce that occurs in our society, why shouldn't we be able to talk about it? So, let's talk about it. And let me address this touchpoint to all who have experienced divorce, and those of you who haven't, take the next 10-12 minutes off.

“Is it legal for a man to divorce his wife?”

That is an easy one to answer. Yes. You can go to any courthouse, Monday through Friday and begin the process. It absolutely is lawful for a man to divorce his wife and for a woman to divorce her husband. Otherwise, everyone who divorced would be in prison. So YES! It is lawful for a man

or woman to divorce their spouse. Even Moses agrees. But as you've already figured out, that is not the issue for Jesus. The Pharisees wanted to make divorce about a piece of paper. Jesus makes it about a "hardness of heart."

"Because of your hardness of heart, Moses wrote this commandment for you."

Uh, oh. You know that line we like to draw between the good people and the bad, the divorced and the non-divorced? Well, that line just got wiped out...erased...eliminated. Because now divorce isn't about a piece of paper, it's about the hardening of one's heart against the other. And a piece of paper doesn't make it right.

So now, any couple that's ever laid in bed with 4 inches between them physically but 400 hundred miles between them emotionally, relationally...well, according to Jesus in this passage, they have been divorced. In other words, it doesn't take a piece of paper to be divorced. Divorce is not a noun...it's a verb...it's a relationship ... or lack thereof.

So, I'm just going to go out on a limb and say that every couple I have ever met has been divorced at some point in their marriage. They just didn't go through the legal process and make it a matter of public record.

Well, that kind of messes with my holier than thou, self-justifying, personal purity and piety, doesn't it?

And even worse, divorce isn't limited to married people! A divorce occurs wherever there is a 'hardening of the heart'. Which means I've experienced divorce with my kids – they were after all 2 years old and teenagers at some point in their lives. And I've experienced divorce with just about every boss I've worked for, present company excluded, of course. And I pretty much experience divorce every time I drive down Pima Road with at least one or two drivers.

So, with this new definition, let me address this touchpoint only to those who have experienced divorce, a hardening of the heart, and those of you who haven't ever experienced a hardening of the heart towards another, take the next 10-12 minutes off.

You see, for Jesus, life isn't about being right or wrong. It's about relationships. The greatest commandment isn't, "Be right with all your heart soul and mind." No, it's "Love with all your heart soul and mind."

You see, for Jesus, life isn't about being right or wrong. It's about relationships.

Which is why I find it **almost** amusing when someone who finds out I am divorced says, "You know, divorce is wrong."

And my response is what's come to be referred to, by people who know me, as my 'divorce rant':

"Really, divorce is wrong??? I wish it was just wrong. I wish that's all it was. Wrong is what you get on an answer on a test. Wrong is half the players I played in my Fantasy Football League last week. Being wrong is the least of the problems of being divorced. It's destructive, damaging, depressing and despairing. It destroys your relationship with your ex. It damages your relationship with your

children, if there are any. It disturbs your relationship with your common friends. It wreaks havoc on your emotions, your spirit, your finances, your whole being. It brings about questions and doubts you never wanted to face about yourself. Divorce is wrong???. Dear God, I wish it was just WRONG!!! And I wish a piece of paper could make it right! But it can't”

OK, end of personal rant.

Now if divorce is so awful, and it is, why is it that the Christian response to divorce has more often than not been more divorce? Just this past week I talked to someone who had been kicked out of their church because they had gotten a divorce. In other words, the church divorced them from the community because they were divorced, and since the church doesn't sanction divorce, it must divorce itself from all who are divorced. It makes perfect sense...right???

So often, we in the church have brought God into the issue of divorce to justify more divorce, a 'hardening of our hearts' towards others. It reminds of the time – and I've used this example before – it reminds me of the time my oldest son was hitting his younger brother and I grabbed him and yelled at him as I spanked him, “We don't hit each other in this family!”

So often, we in the church have brought God into the issue of divorce to justify more divorce, a 'hardening of our hearts' towards others.

So, if you want to tell me that divorce is wrong, I won't disagree with you. In fact I will tell you that saying it is 'wrong' trivializes it, only scratches the surface.

If you want to tell me that divorce is outside the realm of God's will, I will even agree with you on that. I can't imagine God wishing a divorce on anybody.

But if you want to tell me that being divorced puts me outside the realm of Mystery's grace, that it divorces me from Divine mercy and forgiveness... Unh-uh. No way. Not possible.

If you want to tell a woman who is in an abusive relationship that she will step outside of God's grace and mercy if she gets a divorce, not a chance. Staying in an abusive relationship is not God's will, in any way, shape, or form. An abusive relationship is a relationship of 'divorce', not marriage. And we need to not only apologize to the women we have said this to, we need to ask their forgiveness.

Now, let's go back to my relationship with my boys. During their teenage years they pretty much lived outside the realm of my will, but they were never outside the realm of my love, my forgiveness. They never stopped being my sons and I never stopped being their father.

No, being divorced does not put you or me outside the realm of Divine grace and mercy.

And why can I say that? Because in the night in which Jesus was divorced ...er... uhh, I mean betrayed, which is definitely a kind of divorce, a hardening of the heart. In the night Judas divorced Jesus with his betrayal and Peter divorced Jesus with his denial and the rest divorced themselves from Jesus as they abandoned him and ran away from him, in that night...

Jesus took bread and wine and gave himself to them for their forgiveness: he re-membered

himself to them in their separating...dis-membering...divorcing themselves from him.

And it didn't stop there. As he hung on the cross, after being tortured, spit on, mocked and beaten – which I think would qualify as a 'hardening of the heart' and a divorce between him and humanity – he hung on that cross and said, “Father forgive them.”

But here's the real kicker. On that very cross he also cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me.” Or in other words, “My God, my God, why have you divorced me.”

Even the Divine Mystery has experienced divorce. It is not a stretch to say, using the Trinitarian metaphor, that on the cross the Father divorces the Son, abandons and forsakes the Son. It is as we say in our creed, “He descended into Hell”. It is as St. Paul says, “He became sin.” Or to use the theme for today, “He became divorce.” And it even leaves a lasting scar on the Christ, as he still carries the wounds with him in his resurrected body.

No, divorce does not put you outside the realm of the Divine, the Mystery, the Christ, because even divorce has been taken up into the Divine Mystery.

Look, if divorce is as Jesus says, “A hardening of the heart”, then there is enough divorce in this world, and it's not just limited to marriage. If divorce is as Jesus says, “A hardening of the heart”, then there is enough of divorce in this world, and I would like to say, “And let's not bring God into the issue to justify more divorce, a hardening of our hearts towards others.”

Except here's the thing, God has brought Godself into divorce, God has experienced divorce.

You see, on the cross, God willingly became a divorcee'...

...so that you and I will never be divorced from the Divine, the Mystery, the Christ.

Amen.

Spirit in the Desert

Opening Song

Be Still

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God.

Kyrie Eleison

(London Fox Taize Choir)

Kyrie Eleison, Christe Eleison, Kyrie Eleison
Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy

Bible Passage

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

Touchpoint

(Where God's story touches our life story)

In the Arms of God

(Tony Alonso, Marty Haugen, Michael Joncas)

Refrain: Come and rest in the arms of God. Leave your worry and fear. Make your home in the heart of God. God will dry every tear. For the burden you carry will fade within God's care. Come and rest in the arms of God.

1) Gentle is God's way and humble is God's heart. God's love will light the way that leads to peace. Surely you shall see God's goodness and God's grace. Rest now in God's embrace. *Refrain*

2) Do not be afraid. God heals the broken heart. Through grief and disbelief God still remains. God and God alone will be your souls true rest. Fall in the arms of God. *Refrain*

3) You are not alone, for God is always near. Come place your doubt and fear within God's care. God will give you rest, and soothe your weary soul. Dwell in the heart of God. *Refrain*

The Meal

The Lord's Prayer

(Choirs of Annunciation Byzantine Catholic church)

Benediction

A Celtic Blessing

(Margaret Rizza)

The guarding of the God of Life be on you, the guarding of loving Christ be on you, the guarding of the Holy Spirit be on you, to aid and uphold you each day and night of your life.

The guarding of God, the guarding of Christ, the guarding of the Spirit be upon you.

