

Perfect Love Mark 10:2-16 Rev. AJ Mealor 10-7-18

- I. You know, a smart preacher would've clipped the text to make the scripture fit this celebratory day a little better. A smart preacher would've simply made this day about children welcomed by Jesus, and disciples who sought to turn them away because welcoming children would not provide them with a much needed popularity bump in the polls. The disciples were after big donor money while Jesus led a grassroots campaign.
- II. That would've been a much easier path to take. You can tell by the sermon title that's what I wanted to do. Children of the World, what in the world does that have to do with Jesus having an argument with pharisees over divorce? But on Friday, as I sat watching the deeply moving, and possible Oscar contending, movie *A Star Is Born*, I realized you can't just sidestep the hard places in life. Life is not merely sunshine and rainbows. Life is difficult. And if the church can't find a way to speak, to insert itself into the hard moments in life, to find or provide meaning and redemption, and remind us that God is with us, then what are we doing. So, I'm going with a new sermon title: Perfect Love; and we will wade into these deep waters together to hopefully discern how God is speaking to us today.
- III. In the beginning there was God. There was no law. There were no humans or any other living thing, there was simply God, and life was perfect. And then, God created. No matter how it happened, God created and is the author of all life in the universe. God created humanity, gave us the responsibility of having dominion over all of his creation, and life was very good, dare I say it was still perfect. There was peace and harmony. Adam and Eve walked together with God and everything was perfect. This was the original picture of life. Our original purpose in creation was to serve God, walk with God and have our lives in tune with God's will.
- IV. Since the fall, this is the life, this picture of perfection, that God has been calling us back to through prophets, apostles and martyrs, and of course through the life and teachings of Jesus. This utopian vision of creation truly represents what God wants for our us and all of God's children. God desires to be in full, perfect relationship with all of his good creation, and this is the vision that Jesus has of the world as he responds to the Pharisees.
- V. We read Jesus' words on divorce and they appear to be harsh and unforgiving. They have certainly been used that way by the church to shame couples into staying together when they otherwise had no business being married. Jesus' words have also been used by the church to keep abused women from taking their children and running out the door; away from the punishing and brutal world inside their home. There is no doubt that we have misused this text as a way to sell families on pictures of life together that were never going to work for them. In reality, what they created was a festering hell on earth for all affected.
- VI. The Pharisees come to Jesus to test him on an unresolved question within their own ranks. They are trying to trap Jesus, to pigeon hole him into one group or the other.

And, in fact, they are able to do this, just not in the way they expected. But not only are they trying to trap him for their religious, I guess we might say denominational, purposes, but to show the Roman government that they have another rabble-rouser on their hands like John the Baptist who needs to be dealt with. It is no coincidence that they are in the Judean wilderness, the same place John the Baptist made his home, and they are testing Jesus on the same topic that made John lose his head. The pharisees are hoping that recent history would repeat itself, and they'll be rid of another trouble maker. Their hope is that order and peace according to their standards would be restored to the system, and life would go back to normal. A life that kept them in power, and the margins fully established and held at bay.

- VII. Jesus' response takes their discussion a step further than the Pharisees expected though. The Pharisees were playing checkers with Moses' law from Deuteronomy concerning divorce, but Jesus goes a step further and pulls out the trump card of God's original intent in creating the world and humanity. The law was given to the Israelites because they were sinful. They couldn't keep to the vision God had intended for the world, so the law was given so they would have rules and regulations to hold to, but they couldn't keep that either. And so here was the embodiment of the law standing before them. Jesus stands before them as the one who fulfills the law, who knows not only the letter of the law, but shows them, and us, what it means to live it. In Jesus' mind divorce is a sin, there is no getting around this difficult piece. But it is because anything that takes us away from the perfect created order that God set forth in the beginning is sinful. God wants all marriages to honor and respect one another, and to honor God. Jesus is not saying that couples should remain together if there is no longer love in the relationship. He is definitely not saying that a couple should remain together if there is abuse in the relationship.
- VIII. God's hope for marriage is that it would reflect and represent for the world the love that God has for us and all his creation. That is the hope. But as we all know as people we fall short of God's hope of perfection. The second part of this scripture reminds us that when we fall short of this expectation of life together that Jesus welcomes us with open arms. That he loves us still. The constant theme over the last three weeks has been the presence and reference by Jesus of children who represent both literal children, and all those who are unwanted, who are oppressed, those whose presence would not give Jesus and the disciples a prestige bump, but push them farther to the margins.
- IX. But by welcoming the children, Jesus gives us a vision of a perfect love that welcomes divorcées, children, widows, strangers, the abused, and the unwanted home. He reminds them that they are still loved by God regardless of the law. And here at the table we have a prime example of that perfect, self-giving love that God has for the world.
- X. God sent Jesus to share his love with the world, to call his whole created order back into perfect relationship with him. When we come to the table, we bring all our mess with us. We bring all of our broken pieces to the table, and what we find here in return is a

loving God who provides us with hope and grace found in pieces of bread and juice, as reminders of what God first did for us.

- XI. God welcomes to the table imperfect people with all of our blemishes: Democrats, Republicans, independents, Libertarians, people who are distraught over yesterday's events, and those who are excited. God says come to the table to find a love that trumps hate and fear, come to the table to find a God who embraces you and provides real and lasting truth. Come to the table with all of God's children and find redemption and a love that is worth sharing, that is worth living for, that is worth dying for. Friends, this is the Lord's Table, his dinner party spread out across time. May your eyes be opened this day, in the broken pieces of your life to the truth of the Gospel. The feast is ready to begin! Jesus, says "Come little children, come!"