

**Mark 10:1-16**  
**October 3, 2021**  
**The Rev. Dr. Mark W. Jennings**

When I was nine years old, my family moved out of the city of Boulder to a house in the mountains northwest of town. All of a sudden, instead of having **neighbors** a few yards away, we had streams in our backyard and a mountain behind us and a lot of acreage to explore.

Soon after we moved there, my father installed a bell on our back porch. The idea was that instead of one of my parents having to yell for us to come home when we were out exploring or playing, they could just ring the bell and we would know to come home.

It wasn't long before my brother and I tested just how far away we could be and still hear the bell ringing, BUT we could also go explore and play just beyond that and tell my parents, "Gee, we never heard the bell."

How far can we push things? How far can we bend a rule before we break it?  
How much can we get away with?

That's really the question the Pharisees ask Jesus. How far can we take the rules of divorce so we still get everything we want without breaking them.

Notice first though, in the passage that we just read, Jesus and his disciples have "crossed over the Jordan." Often in Mark's gospel, when Jesus goes beyond the traditional borders of the Holy Land, it is a metaphor. It is because he is going to go beyond the traditional understandings of Jewish teaching.

And in this case, the traditional teaching is about divorce and how a husband can leave his wife while still following the rules. It's a calculating, and cold process that leaves women, who had little agency, without a safety net. It's a shame she will then have to live with for the rest of her life. But...the husband is still following the rules.

Rules.

Rules are made for the betterment of the whole.

No running in the sanctuary!

Wear your mask.

You stop at that 4 way stop on your way home

or—at our house-- we stop eating after 8:00 every night.

Also at our house, every Wednesday, the girls call because WEDNESDAY, you might not know, is

CALL YOUR MOTHER WEDNESDAY...a high holy day

Rules are not random but rather they reflect something we value:

we don't run in the sanctuary because we value your safety or we value this sacred space and running seems disrespectful

we wear our mask because we value one another

If we were only rule driven and detached from the value behind the rule, like the pharisees, we'd lose our moral compass, our bearings,

And our actions, though following a rule—technically—might be devoid of the value the rule was meant to protect

Like...what if you arrive at that 4 way stop but suddenly the sign on your side is gone?

You don't have to stop, right? Technically you are not breaking a rule.

**BUT**

If you remember the value behind the rule, that the signs keep cars from colliding in the intersection, then of course, you stop and you look, as if the sign was there. Why? Because you know someone could get hurt if you didn't. Jesus, rather than getting caught up in the trickery of the Pharisees, takes the conversation away from the talk of rules, and ways of interpreting them to benefit men, instead turns to the topic of values.

He turns to LOVE. The importance of love in the world. He tells them, these rules were made because your hearts are hard. Rules are for the hard-hearted ones who have forgotten their personal

moral code. They need external reminders of what should be an internal compass. The divorce laws were meant to give women some protection; men had to justify their reasoning so women weren't discarded on a whim. Well, that's what was supposed to happen but as we can see, husbands found ways to interpret the rules to their advantage.

Rather than getting sucked into the Pharisees arguments, Jesus goes in the opposite direction. He wants to get away from the justifications for divorce and remind them and us of the beginnings of creation. That a loving God loved us into existence to love and care for one another, We are not separate but joined. The exact opposite of divorce.

This doesn't mean that divorce isn't sometimes necessary. This passage isn't about forbidding divorce. It is about remembering our values and the command to love and care for one another. Jesus recognizes the injustice to women when men scheme to divorce them for their own gain. He's not about to get into a debate about the nuanced legalities of the divorce process. Instead, he reverses the discussion to speak of togetherness in love, that we're created to be together, to care for one another...even in divorce.

I think it's obvious from Jesus' words that it is God's intention for us to be loving, committed to justice whether in marriage or divorce. God tells us that we should love, that we know what to do ...as the prophet says, (say it with me) do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.

It's about having integrity: in our relationships with God and with one another. Rules aren't about integrity, they are external guideposts you're expected to follow BUT values are about integrity. Values are not about what is lawful, they're about what is in here (point to heart). Integrity. A life of integrity is a life of wholeness because we love God.

Love inspires integrity because we don't want to hurt the people we love. To Jesus that meant including women. And As we also read, it means embracing the children, who in the culture of his day, were not considered to be people of value at all. For us, this means to look to Jesus as our example. The commentator Alan Brehm says about this passage, "And when we look at Jesus, what is it that we see? We see him embracing the ones nobody else would embrace. We see him confronting

the religious people with the falseness of their self-righteousness. We see him forgiving sinners and restoring people to their right mind. We see him teaching people to follow the commandments by loving God whole-heartedly and loving others sincerely.”

For today’s Peace and Global witness offering we are urged to cast off discord and division, to embrace God’s mission of reconciliation. That’s what this scripture is about.

Who are the ignored and the powerless around us? Who are the ones that society ignores or despises? Those are people we are reminded to love, join with, invite to the table. On this World Communion Sunday we remember anew that all of us are part of the Kingdom of God and our call is to love one another, every **one**.