



Sermons from Northwood United Church

"This Global Enterprise"

Mark 10:2-16

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May the words of our mouths, the meditations of our hearts, and the actions of our lives, be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Special Sundays come and go but I have to tell you right off the top that this Sunday is right up there as one of my favourites in the year. Worldwide communion Sunday. I am not sure what it is but I think it may have something to do with the image that I have of groups of people gathered all around the world: in great majestic cathedrals, and in huts under Acacia trees, in shelters under the pouring rain and in the wide open air, in the hallowed halls of the Vatican, with incense and chanting in the Eastern Churches, and to the music of marimbas in Guatemala, all coming to the table having heard the words, "This is the body of Christ, do this in remembrance of me." And no matter where we are and how we share this sacrament, we can say with one voice, "yes, Jesus, we remember." This is a day when the rich breadth of this world community we have is celebrated. It is a feel good day for a church in need of a feel good day.

Not unlike the feeling I had when I ran across this clip:

<http://youtu.be/L6TGxKvSqH8>

Global enterprise. Nice. Today we celebrate the worldwide communion, the global enterprise. However this Sunday is not only renown for that but it is officially called "watch the preacher squirm Sunday. And it comes around every three years in which we look at the gospel reading and the preacher is supposed to say something intelligible about that pesky divorce passage in which Jesus would appear to come down pretty hard on those of us who are divorced: "whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." Period. Full stop. Pretty harsh. Watch the preacher squirm.

IF life were simple, there would be no need to squirm. If I were absolutely convinced that marriage, once entered into, is always without exception, life giving and healthy for all, no squirming. If there was no abuse, no broken promises, no miscommunication, no growing apart, no drug and alcohol problems, and the list goes on and on. If life were simple, there would be no squirming. But life is not simple.

For all that we long for community, for companionship, for intimacy, there is another level at which community, companionship, intimacy create trouble and pain, diminish us wound us. At such times we say, with Jean PAul Sartre, that "Hell is other people."

That is why those difficult words of Jesus on divorce are so significant. This is not the day and this is not the setting for a lengthy explanation of his apparent stern and uncompromising statements. Suffice it to say that never once in the gospel record does Jesus speak judgementally about people who are poor, oppressed, or vulnerable. Judgement is always reserved for the powerful, those in control who use their position to dominate others, and make them long for solitude. In this instance he is speaking in a context where men had such power over women that a man could divorce his wife, for any or no reason at all, simply by standing up in public and saying "I divorce you" three times. Needless to say, women- who, by the way were considered possessions, chattel, secondary at best- had no comparable way of getting themselves out of an abusive or empty relationship. So clear is this that we can say without question that the

issue Jesus is going after is not the morality of divorce as a social convention, but the ethics of power. You do not treat people this way, he said, in the kind of community God has in mind.

Which brings me back to worldwide communion Sunday and this global enterprise we are in. You see there is something about being human that makes us want to be together, to not be alone, to be in community, be that a community of two in a marriage or 15 in a house church or 250 under that Acacia I was talking about earlier, or 2000 in St. Peter's Cathedral. And we are called to shape that community in the way that we believe God has in mind for human community. And key to that kind of community, quite the opposite of Sartre's hell is in a new understanding of power. It has taken us centuries to discover the simple truth that Jesus was stating so clearly: that imbalance of power destroys the kind of community God has in mind. It destroys the kind of marriage, the kind of church, the kind of global enterprise possible by God's grace. When there is an imbalance of power, Sartre is right, hell is other people. If the city, or the province, or the nation is so constructed that the few make life and death decisions for the many and the few have more than they can ever use, while the many do not have enough to eat, there is no dignity, no freedom. Community becomes impossible- hell is other people. If the church so shapes its life that some people are welcome and can participate fully while others, because of their youth or their age, or their poverty or their disability or their schooling or their sexuality, can only participate partially, the community God has in mind is impossible- hell is other people.

We gather here, though, at the invitation of the one whose understanding of community is made known in the child whom he sets in the very centre of the community, and in the women, despised and powerless, whose cause he makes his own. We gather here in response to his call to become a new kind of community, marked by respect and mutuality, where no one is lonely because no one need be afraid. We gather here to celebrate the extraordinary diversity of the "global enterprise", rejoicing that "there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female" and that we are all one in Christ.