**Springfield Presbyterian Church**

**October 3rd, 2021**

**All in the Family**

1. **No Easy Task**

If you heard the words of this Gospel lesson and wanted to

run away from the text, may you know you are not alone. This week, I stopped and listened – why did I want to run specifically?

 Many of you know that I am newly married and have been divorced from a same-sex marriage, so a lot of these words push particular buttons in me that make me question my own worth, my own relationship with God, and lead me to ask some soul-heartening questions. And I doubt I’m alone – I know that some folks in our congregation have been divorced and remarried and when we read this plain text and walk away, no one feels any better than before they read the passage.

 I can’t claim this for all divorces, but I can claim it for my own. This was no easy decision, it wasn’t one that you come to overnight, but over many many nights where you question whether this relationship is sustainable. You try and work through the challenges, but when values and dreams and hopes for the future are so opposing, the best thing we could do for one another was to walk away. While there’s difficult feelings all around divorce, I hope that she has a partner that loves her, cares for her, and shares the same dreams and vision she does for the future. Our divorce was months, if not a year or two in the making, and the greatest act of love was to step away instead of making each other miserable for years to come.

 Divorce gets a bad wrap, often due to tabloids that depict celebrities having two week marriages or on the highway billboard that offers quick rates for divorce. Yes, divorce might be quick for some, but for many, it comes with anguish and some level of stigma. Even as I got married in the last few weeks, our marriage certificate read my status as ‘divorced’ and I looked at Bryan and told him that I felt some shame, but I didn’t know why.

 And in Jesus’ time, divorce had even worse consequences than a troubled soul. Women who received a ‘certificate of divorce’ would lose most of her rights, including the right to own property. These women may have found themselves begging for food on the street or prostituting themselves to gain income. Ultimately, Jesus’ answer to the disciples on divorce could have been more out of a concern of women getting treated poorly and having their lives torn apart by a ‘certificate of divorce.’ And in God’s will for people to stay together, there is an undertone and sense of mutual respect and concern that should be given for each partner.

 So is divorce permissible? Yes. Jesus’ answer to the disciples is tied up in the problematic context of the day. We can also assume that God’s hope for each of us, if we choose to marry, is that we will have a joyful marriage where each partner can benefit from mutual love, cooperation and compromise, and a partner for the journey.

1. It’s not about LGBTQ+

Another problematic area of the text will hit anyone who is in the LGBTQ+ spectrum, for the

Scripture says, “for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife…” This has led some folks to say – the only true marriage is between man and woman. Yet, as most things in the Bible are – it’s complicated. The context of the day is husband and wife and the probability of the idea of LGBTQ+ folks just wasn’t a cultural reality. It probably was not even a thought that Jesus or the disciples had, so we need to be mindful that we cannot place our modern circumstances directly on top of the lesson.

1. But Marriage

And then, for the actual family matter of marriage. The bottom

line is that when we marry, our hearts are joined with another soul for the journey. This is a beautiful concept, one where we can rejoice at shared values, shared dreams, and shared hopes. Marriage is an act not only of those who marry, but those who witness the marriage and get to celebrate in the love that each has found in the other.

 As a recently married woman, I can speak to the fact that we can get caught up in all the details, the favors, the flowers, and the dreaded seating plan. We can forget what the day means and frankly, those last few days before the wedding, you might have reconsidered elopement as a solid option. Yet on that day, when your family by blood and family by choice come to commemorate this love, a beautiful act of the Spirit is happening right in our midst. God rejoices in this gathering, and so shall we, as we get the honor of watching marriage take place before our eyes.

1. And the children

The last part of our passage today is probably the easiest to speak of – the sense that children

should be able to gather before Jesus and to witness to the wisdom of our young ones. I can almost say with certainty that we have all experienced moments where a child speaks and completely knocks us off our feet.

 I remember one of these moments at our children’s time when Noella was sitting here and I asked a question and she answered with such a beautiful and stunning answer that was actually right in line with the thought of Saint Augustine. I remember being struck and told Noella to take the pulpit, because her wisdom was way beyond my own.

 And we’ve seen those moments numerous times, so maybe our best faithful move is listening closer to our children and youth. Maybe we need to take on a child-like faith – one that finds awe at things adults look past, one that questions everything and craves curiosity, and one that finds beauty in the smallest of things. Jesus is clear – no one should stop the children from seeing him, because they understand faith in a way that we need to.

1. Breaking down the text

This morning, I’ve tried to break down the text with the topics of marriage, divorce, and

children – all family matters. I hope in some way it brings you some level of peace or understanding, no matter what your story is – whether it has involved divorce, marriage, LGBTQ+ relationships, raising children, or none of the above. My hope for you is that this examination will help you to help others and give you the knowledge and wisdom for the days ahead.

 When a friend is struggling with divorce, when they are questioning if God will still love them, may you have a word of love to impart. When someone tries to use this text as a defense against LGBTQ+ people, may you speak to the context of what’s actually going on and break down the barriers to seek greater understanding and be an ally. When you watch someone you love get married, may you rejoice in what God is doing and how the Spirit has tied these two souls together in mutual love and respect. When you hear the voices of children speaking wisdom into the world, by God, listen, listen closely and encourage them to keep asking questions.

 May the Word of God be one that informs us, enlightens us, and encourages us for each day and circumstance to come. And above all, may the Word point us to the overwhelming truth of God’s love for each and every one of us. Amen.