October 7th – 10:30am

Springfield Presbyterian Church

The Blended Family of Christ

1. **Where Do I Start?**

 When I initially read our passage from Mark this morning, I wish you could have heard the deep sigh that echoed in the room. This is one of those passages that can be filled with so many minefields. I think it comes from the fact that there are so many ways you can distort this passage or make fast and clear assumptions as right rules for living today. People have made all sorts of claims from these fourteen verses alone: “Only heterosexual marriages are holy and Godly”, “No one should ever have a divorce and if you do, you’re sinful”, and “Only if you become faithful at childhood and be a lifelong Christian, that’s the way you’ll get into Heaven and the Kingdom of God.”

 And the frustrating thing about this passage is that the Pharisees asked a question to test Jesus to try to trick him – to try and make him offend someone. The Pharisees, like the bullies on the schoolyard, were trying to find a way to make Jesus falter in this question. Yet, Jesus throws the question back to them, reframes the question, and helps us more clearly see what it means to be the blended and beautiful family of God who are actively seeking the Kingdom.

 So, in an effort to gain some foothold on this passage, I’m going to try my best, like a great three-point sermon, to talk about those three claims I spoke about just a moment ago, and find a rich, pastoral, and modern interpretation that points back to the equality and love that Jesus points to in this passage.

II. For the LGBT+, The Singles, And Somewhere In Between

 This passage has been used often to call LGBTQ+ relationships sinful, based solely upon the verses six and seven, which states, “...God made them male and female, for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh.” It would be easy to point to this passage and say, “Well, the Scriptures say, ‘male’ and ‘female’ – so that’s the only relationship that can rightfully exist. That is to take the text and read it right from the page and assume that there is only one way.

 Yet, Jesus does not stand there before the Pharisees and claim that same-sex marriages are wrong, because honestly, that wasn’t the question at hand. It’s a non-issue right here. Jesus himself is a single man, who, as we understand, never was married. So, does that mean that single people are wrong to be single – are they wrong not to join together with a companion? No.

 We, as humankind, have put words in Jesus’ mouth when we claim in this passage that heterosexual marriage is the only way, for Jesus isn’t outright or explicitly calling any other relationships sinful. He is simply speaking to the matter at hand, which for the Pharisees, was the relationship between a man and a woman.

III. What About Divorce?

 Another easy minefield of this passage is to claim that divorce itself is sinful. Yet, the reality is more nuanced than that. Jesus says that divorce is allowed, but it isn’t what God wants for us. For Jesus, it seems that it is more of a pastoral concern, particularly within the context of the period in which he speaks. For when a divorce certificate was written, a woman lost most of her rights and she could not own property. Women were found begging on the street, just trying to get by day to day. Jesus prays that when God joins people, that nothing will separate them. God longs for those who are married to have joyful unions that are equal and bless each other.

 Yet, in the broken world we live in, divorce is sometimes necessary. When a marriage has run its course and a couple has expended all their options of reconciliation, or one is in imminent danger, divorce is a pastoral move for the protection, safety, and mental and emotional stability of two people. A person, who reads this passage who is divorced, might think, ‘Does this mean I’m sinful, because I’m divorcee?’ And that is, unfortunately, not the right question to be asked – the question is deeper than that. The divorce is not the sin, but the ways in which we can hurt each other in marriage are sins to be exposed, lovingly confronted, and if possible, redeemed. But the bottom line is that divorce is not, in of itself, a sin, it is a pastoral concern, for God longs for us to be happy and well and if the way is clear, united as one.

III. Let the Little Children Come to Me

 It seems odd, really, that the follow-up verses from this discussion on marriage and divorce, is about the children coming to Jesus. As a reader, it seems out of place, and perhaps it is – but it isn’t to be ignored either.

 Jesus is clear that children are to come to him and that they are the role models of our faith. As we grow into adulthood, we often are weighed down with cynicism, bitterness, and a lack of play and simple thoughtfulness. Jesus calls us to return to that faith, the faith of a child, that isn’t naïve, but one that stands in joy, awe, and wonder, simply at knowing God and feeling God’s love and kindness and compassion.

 Jesus is not saying that the only people to go to Heaven are those who accept Christ as a child, but rather, the importance is put on the fact that when you have a faith like a child – that’s where the Kingdom of God is truly seen. We need to tear back the layers of our own doubts, our own fears, and our own rationalizations, and step into a childlike frame of mind, where we joyfully see God and God’s work in this world and in our lives with the joy of a child.

IV. Covering the Big Topics

 Whew. Perhaps the most challenging part of this passage for a pastor is that any one of these topics I’ve addressed and more could have it’s own individual Bible study. In a matter of ten minutes, you cannot address the complexities, nuances, and context of each and every matter, alongside the entire Gospel of Mark. Yet, hopefully, in the words I’ve shared, we have a place to begin and a place to think more deeply about what God is trying to share with us in this passage.

 In the end, out of these three topics, God is clear about God’s intentions for us, and that is love, equality, and hope for all people of all genders, sexualities, age, race, etc. The Kingdom of God is a blended family, from the divorcees, to the gays, to the elderly man, to the youngest child, to the homeless, to the wealthy, to the oppressed, to the privileged. In entering the Kingdom of God, you see that God loves us, for us – and the diversity in which he has created and crafted.

 As we come to the table, to share this meal that Jesus offered so freely to the disciples, with all their accomplishments and failures, we also come as people on the journey. As the blended family of God, who are seeking to make the Kingdom of God a reality here on earth, let us join together in this meal, praying for equality, for justice, for love to prevail. And as you eat the bread and drink the cup, may you know, from the deepest part of your being, the love that God has for you and for all people and from that love, may you seek to encourage equality and justice in tangible ways so that the Kingdom of God is a closer reality in our lives, in our communities, and in our world. Amen.