

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota
October 7, 2012

Mark 10:2-16
Genesis 2:18-24
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Kids, did you hear about the little dove that helped the little bunnies? It happened down in Texas at a "rescue ranch" where they bring animals that have been hurt or are in trouble. Do you see the picture? At this ranch there is a little one-legged homing pigeon/dove named "Noah." Noah can never leave because he couldn't survive out in the world alone. A while back a mother rabbit got killed and someone found her three helpless little babies and brought them to the rescue ranch too.

Well, the little bunnies were put into a little cage on the floor and Noah; the one-legged bird kept going over to the cage and looking in. Noah even started to sleep outside the door of the cage where the bunnies were. One day the workers noticed that there were only two little rabbits in the cage. It was then that they discovered that one of the bunnies had squeezed through the cage and was sleeping under the wings of Noah the dove. Pretty soon, all three of the little bunnies were finding shelter and rest under the wings and warm body of Noah.

Kids, now, some years later, Noah is still sheltering little critters that have lost their momma. The people who own the rescue ranch say that Noah is just like God. When we need help or love and warmth, God shelters us beneath God's wings as well. It even says in the Bible, Psalm 91:4: "God will cover you with his feathers and under his wings you will find refuge."

And, Kids, did you notice, Noah the dove was able to help the other little animals who were in trouble, even though Noah was injured himself. He only had one leg, but he could get around well enough to shelter those little bunnies. The same is true in all of our lives. We may have injuries, hurts or troubles too, but somehow, God has made us strong enough to help others anyway. Sometimes we even learn how to help other people better because we have been through the same troubles that they have first. First God helps us with our troubles, and then God uses us to help others with theirs. Thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

The world is not as it should be. Some bad things that happen are **accidents**. I begged and pleaded for what seemed like years. Finally when I was about seven, my parents bought me a pair of genuine cowboy boots just like Roy Rogers, Matt Dillon and John Wayne wore. They were black; high topped, pointy toes, and had all kinds of red and blue swirls and gem stones. It was a wonderful day when we drove into Duluth to buy my boots. I wore them in the car and promptly jumped out and modeled them for my older sister and brother when we arrived home. It was summer and we lived way out in the woods so I didn't get a chance that day to show any of my school friends.

After showing my boots off to my family, I decided that I was going to walk down to the lake. I was sure that I was about the coolest cowboy in town. I was so proud of my new boots. As I walked up the plank to our little wooden dock I glanced out over the lake. I failed to notice that one of the surface planks on the dock had slipped out of place. There was nothing supporting the end beneath where I placed my first step. Down went the plank. Down went Cowboy Darrell. In a flash I found myself with both feet up to my knees in the warm water of Ire's Lake.

This was a very bad thing. Our family didn't waste money. I was sure a spanking was in order. I didn't know exactly what to do, but decided that it was best if my parents didn't know what happened. Maybe if I hid my boots under my bed, they might just dry out and be fine by morning. They weren't fine. They shrunk. I couldn't get them back onto my feet. I don't think that I got a spanking, but I never did get another pair of boots either.

The world is not as it should be. Some bad things that happen are **our own fault**. It was Christmas Day and our little house was plump full of relatives. The adults and older kids were on the main floor, talking and eating. The littler kids, like me, were in the basement, playing games and eating. After a while, we littler kids got kind of bored with our new Christmas games. Someone suggested that we should play "**camping.**" We all thought that was a great idea. It struck me that it would be good to have a **camp fire** for our camping trip in the basement. Everyone thought that was a wonderful idea. I knew where the matches were. We had a whole room full of firewood. There was paper to get it started. Pretty soon I had the paper burning and was just about to add some kindling when my

mom came crashing through the crowd and threw a bucket of water on my fire. Then my dad came crashing through the crowd and I soon had a spanking right there in front of all of my cousins. By my choice, I spent the rest of Christmas Day under my bed alone.

The world is not the way it should be. When my wife and I were married, we struggled a lot the first two years or so. I thought that she was too stubborn. She thought that I was too stubborn. We both thought that divorce was wrong so we never considered that. But I could see in her eyes at times that murder was a very real option. Marriage can still be hard work at times, even now as we approach our 40th anniversary. Things just go haywire sometimes, but God has **not only kept us together**, but even, amazingly, **blessed us** in the good and in the bad times.

In our first lesson from **Genesis 2**, we hear of **God's beautiful, creative work**. We hear of God's intention for God's people to live in peace and serenity. Yet within a few short verses, all hell breaks loose. "**Sin**" enters in. The original people turn away from God and God's will for their lives and try to be their own God. They try to take care of themselves without God. Immediately broken relationships take place – between God and people, between Adam and Eve, between people and the created world. I still see the same brokenness in my life and in our world this very day.

In our Gospel lesson from **Mark 10**, Jesus is once again being tested by the religious authorities of his day. They challenge him about his view on **divorce**. I bet that more people get divorces in Aitkin County in a year than get married. Less than 20% of America consists of the traditional **father, mother and two kids** household any more. In the Lutheran church, 85% of the individuals who go through a divorce leave the church. I would guess that a third of the kids in our Aitkin schools live with single parents or in blended families. Divorce touches just about every life somehow.

Let's take a look at the **context** of this passage. What was going on in Jesus' day concerning divorce? Way back in the most ancient parts of the Old Testament, **Moses**, Deuteronomy 24, grants the possibility of divorce. He is quoted as allowing a man to get a divorce, "**because he finds something about her that he doesn't like or that she is guilty of some shameful conduct.**" Jesus knew this meant that if the wife burned supper, a prettier woman came along or if the wife committed adultery, that she could be gone in a day. A husband could use **any reason** to divorce his

wife. And only men were allowed to get divorces, except in the case of adultery. The divorce laws were meant for the protection of women and families so that an irresponsible husband couldn't just abandon them with no support. But the whole system was based upon the belief that women had no personal worth.

Jesus throws down the gauntlet when he says “**No!**” to easy divorce or to any divorce. He quotes Genesis 2 to affirm that the marriage “**union**” is ultimate. God made us to be in relationship with our spouse. Divorce is only a **concession** that God granted to a broken world. That God would even bend/respond to our brokenness is pure grace. God sees and cares about our pain. Yet the **ultimate will** of God is still to **preserve and to strengthen relationships** – between God and people, between people and each other. God moves to bless all relationships between:

- Spouses
- Parents & children,
- Neighbor and neighbor,
- Friend and friend.

At one point, Jesus said, “**Who are my mother, brothers and sisters? They are those who do my Father's will.**” The Romans of Jesus' day saw Christianity as a cult that challenged the basic unit of society – the family. **Jesus declares** that **our relationship to God** is of **ultimate concern**. But **God's gift** is that if that relationship is carried out in God's way, it will ultimately **strengthen family units** and **all good relationships**.

And now, Jesus announces, God is doing a new thing! The kingdom of God has come to redeem (buy back) individuals and the whole creation – including relationships. Jesus doesn't come with more rules to follow. **Jesus comes as God present to help us** – be it to **stay married** and also if we **become divorced**. God's will is not fickle or senseless. God wills for our own good – yet in the midst of a fickle, hurting and sinful world. “**Divorce**,” Jesus says, is against God's will. Yet at times, it may be the lesser of evils. Either way, divorce falls under God's compassionate concern. Some denominations deny Holy Communion to those who have been divorced. Here all are sinners, and anyone who needs and wants forgiveness is welcome at the Lord's Table, again and again and forever.

The Pharisees were all tied up in the law, written codes for the proper way to live as God's people. These rules were easy for the leaders, respectable

citizens, males to keep. The Pharisees knew the easy answer. Jesus gave them the tough answer which had **far more compassion, hope and uplifting power for wounded people**. I don't have any easy answers for our context today. Too many easy answers result in driving people away from God and from each other. That is not God's will.

There is hardly a person who is not touched by brokenness here among us. In very real and painful ways we all face the consequences of our own mistakes or of what the world throws at us. This church is **not a country club for people who have perfect lives**. It is a **hospital for those folks who know that they are not perfect, but that they are loved by God anyway**. The grace of God **welcomes** us here. The grace of God allows us to **share and bear one another's burdens**. Everyone that I've ever performed a wedding for has planned to be married to their spouse for the rest of their lives. When someone goes through a divorce, it is just like experiencing a death. If they have the courage to come back to worship after that, people may not say anything to them. People don't want to hurt them or to make them cry. When no one says anything, the divorced person gets the feeling that either **everyone is judging them** or that **no one really cares**. Either way, they will not likely come back to worship again after that. **When we see someone** who has suffered the pain of a **divorce**, of a **death**, of **loss of home/job**, of **legal trouble**, or **whatever crisis** – we need to step up and speak to them. **"I'm sorry about what happened to you. What can I do to help/support you?"**

Can First Lutheran be the kind of a place where:

- The **love of God** embraces us,
- Everyone is **welcome**, no matter what is going on in their life,
- We **trust** one another as sisters and brothers of Jesus,
- **Truth and hope** are shared,
- **Healing power** flows through each of us to each other?

My cowboy **boots were gone**, never to be worn again – but I knew that I was **still loved** by my mom and dad. That **campfire** in the basement resulted in a **spanking** – but I still knew that I was **loved** by my mom and dad. My boots and spanking are long since forgotten – **but my relationship with my mom and dad keeps me thanking God** for them to this very day, long after their deaths. **God is the source of that love** and relationship in our lives. God **wills for the best good** and that is for us to be in relationship with God first and then with the people around us next.

God is opposed to anything that hurts us – yet, in our broken world, God is not about to give up on us over boots, fires, divorces or even murder...

Where was Jesus headed that day when the Pharisees asked him about divorce? He was headed for Jerusalem, a **human-made cross** and his own **death at our hands**. He was headed there to make it perfectly clear **how far God is willing to go** to keep us in relationship with God and with each other now and forever. **Where do we go from here? We go to God and to each other, in love and compassion, again and again.** That's God's will... Therein **forgiveness**, **healing** and **salvation** abound. Thanks be to God. Amen.