Pentecost 20, October 6, 2024
Text: Mark 10:2-16
Theme: Two Traditions Undone

The Gospel for today shows us two really interesting points of view with regard to human traditions. First the Pharisees are questioning Jesus about divorce in an effort to test him we're told. Would Jesus overrule Moses? Would Jesus veer away from God's Law and soften it to appease the masses? No, Jesus quoted Scripture back to them and they would just have to deal with it. This is what God says. Marriage is intended to be for life. Period. There is no loophole in which you can divorce and feel good about it. People love to find justification for their sin, especially sin that is publicly known. And society is often more than happy to appease them if it fits society's current agenda. For instance, we live in a world where so-called gender affirming medical treatment for minors without parental consent is considered good. But selling cigarettes to minors will bring the wrath of the state down upon your head. What makes either innately good or bad? Jesus won't play that game. Anything that conflicts with God's Word is sin. God made you male or female. Rejecting God's gift is sin. Smoking damages our bodies and anything we do to damage our bodies, including being overweight, smoking, drinking too much alcohol or being lazy and sedentary, is poor stewardship of God's gift to us, and therefore, sin according to the 5th and 7th commandments. Sin is sin and needs to be repented

of and forgiven. That's the only course of action that is appropriate and that is the only process God allows: repentance and forgiveness. Jesus always goes back God's Word. As Luther asked many times when answering difficult questions, "what does the Word say?"

Then the Gospel according to Mark jumps to the little children sitting on Jesus' lap. The disciples were offended by this and wanted the children's parents to get them in line. Children were not supposed to bother a rabbi. If a child had a question, he went to his father and the father, if he could not answer the question, would go to the rabbi. Now what do divorce and children going to the rabbi have in common? They were both social norms that Jesus overturned quite blatantly. Jesus had no patience for the traditions of human beings taking precedence over the Word of God. Nowhere has God ever diminished children. Throughout the Old Testament, children are a focus of God's love and concern with many passages directly addressing the spiritual care and education of children.

The Word of God is the Word of God and it stands as written. Sometimes, there is stuff in there that my sinful nature would like to dismiss. It's okay when there is something in the Bible that you don't like. That is just human. But being human does not mean it is right. That is where we drive into the ditch every time. Why do some churches overtly teach false doctrine? Because they "feel" that God's

word could not possibly mean what it says. They believe that the Word of God was culturally influenced. So, for instance, St. Paul says that women are not permitted to preach in church. Why is that? God does not tell us why, other than the pastor stands as Christ's representative on earth and Christ was male. Beyond that, Adam is supposed to be the head of the family and Eve the helpmate. I know that does not always workout in practice because people are sinful. Sometimes men abuse their power, and sometimes women steal the power of headship. But there is no doubt that God intended the husband to be head of the family and the wife to be his helpmate. He could not have said it any clearer in multiple places.

Some Christians don't like this, and that's ok. You don't have to like everything God says. But that does not give you license to change it to fit your desires. You hear all the justifications. Paul was a chauvinist, a misogynist. The Bible was culturally influenced by its time. That was a less enlightened time. One woman asked me if I wanted to go back to treating cancer with leeches again. I asked her if Scripture says that God commands us to treat cancer with leeches because if it does, I'm on the leech bandwagon. But it doesn't, so we are free to treat cancer in ways that seem more productive than bleeding a person. Follow God's Word, first and foremost, and everything else will fall into place.

On the other hand, never let human traditions limit you. Why shouldn't children approach the Rabbi? Human tradition. Why do we have worship on Saturday night here? Human tradition. Why do only men play darts and only women belong to Dorcas and LWML? Human tradition. Things that we do because of tradition are not bad in and of themselves, but they can always be changed and should be changed if they stop serving their purpose. If we have some event or activity that people no longer want to participate in, there is nothing wrong with discontinuing it and moving on to something new.

Mark is showing us one tradition, divorce, which God calls sinful, that human beings had begun to justify as not sinful because that was more convenient that way. It had come to the point where a Jewish man could divorce his wife for anything she did that displeased him, even if that was something as innocuous as burning his dinner. It was a way of keeping women in line because they had no voice in that society without a man. Then Mark shows us something that was in no way sinful that human beings had decided was sin, that is the children approaching the Rabbi. Jesus is clear that not only can children approach the religious leader but that they are welcomed with loving arms to do so.

The point is the same for both examples that Mark gives to us. The Word of God is what guides us, not human ideas. If God speaks

to it, that is the Law no matter what. It doesn't matter whether you like it or not. It doesn't matter how it makes you feel. The Word of God is the Word of God. If God does not speak to it, do whatever best glorifies him and if it doesn't matter, do what you want.

Mark shows us two issues effected by God's Word and how human beings had twisted it to fit their traditions or desires. God's Almighty Word is His gift to us, and when we follow it, we receive amazing blessings. If our feelings or our traditions say something different, they are wrong, and it is incredibly arrogant to think that it is okay to ignore God's Word because we have thought up something new. God gives us everything we need. Through His Word, He instructs us on every matter of importance. He gives the strength we need to follow His Word in His body and blood that enters into us through our mouths. Jesus knows that we will need help to stay true to His Word, not because His Word is unduly taxing but because Satan will do everything he can to distract us from following the Lord. Jesus laid His hands on the little children. Jesus literally enters into us through the Holy Sacrament. We have the strength to overcome every lie of Satan and to follow only God.