

Behold My Heart (*Ecce Cor Meum*)
A Sermon on Mark 10:2-16 for Cox Chapel
Delivered by Susan Robb, October 8, 2006

Last week our family was driving from here to west Texas and we had reached that point in our travels where we were remote enough that there were only a couple of static stations available on the radio, and as is usually the case, those just happened to be of the Country and Western variety. Driving along listening to our country tunes, we noticed that in the course of a very short time, we heard more than a few songs relating to divorce. One voice twanged out the golden oldie, “Our D-I-V-O-R-C-E becomes final today.” A few minutes later we heard the proclamation, “There Ain’t Nothin’ in this House Worth Fightin’ Over.” But our absolute favorite was, “I Put the Gold Band on the Right Left Hand This Time.”

Statistics show almost half of all marriages in America will end in divorce. It’s no secret that divorce is prevalent in our culture, but surprisingly, it was also common in Jesus’ time. Divorce was a hot topic of debate among Rabbis. Mosaic Law, in Deuteronomy, allowed for divorce if a man found anything objectionable about his wife, and required a certificate of divorce stating she was free to marry someone else. The certificate was viewed as an act of mercy, so that she might not be left without financial means. Women could not own property, they *were* property, and so they were dependent on husbands or sons to provide for them economically. The big question of debate was “what does ‘objectionable’ mean?”

There were two schools of thought here. In the Shammai School, the only reason a man might divorce his wife was for adultery (husbands were not charged with adultery, only women, and only men could initiate divorce). The Hillel School said if a husband

found ANYTHING objectionable about her; she burned dinner, talked to strange men, spoke disrespectfully about her husband's relations in his earshot, if he found a woman he considered more beautiful...Human nature being what it is, the Hillel School won the day with women being cast aside indiscriminately, their welfare hanging in the balance.

So Now, as Jesus begins his journey toward Jerusalem and the cross, he goes along teaching the crowds and his followers about what it means to be a disciple, when he is confronted by the ever irritating Pharisees. Hoping to trap Jesus into refuting Mosaic Law, they ask, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

Ever ready for their questions, Jesus answers, "What did Moses command you?" When the Pharisees say, "Moses says its okay." Jesus responds, "It's because of your hardness of heart [Moses] wrote this commandment for you. "

We discover that many of the men of Israel, including the Pharisees have developed "cardio sclerosis," or hardening of the heart. The actual Greek word used here for hardness of heart is *sklerokardia*. There are two other places in Mark's gospel where Jesus shows concern for the condition of the Pharisees hearts: When the Pharisees complain that Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath, and again when they question why Jesus' disciples eat without washing their hands (which was a breach of dietary law). In these instances scripture says that Jesus was "grieved at their hardness of heart," and he quoted Isaiah saying their "hearts were far from [God]." On one hand, the Pharisees interpret the Law strictly to the detriment of the sick and the hungry, and on the other, they cling to what Moses has "allowed" to the detriment of those most vulnerable in their society. Legalism, it seems, brings on heart disease.

But Jesus offers a cure for Cardiosclerosis – He asks them to take a look at the heart of God when it comes to relationships. Several years ago Magdalen College at Oxford commissioned former Beatle, Paul McCartney, to compose a work to commemorate the 550th anniversary of the college’s founding and the opening of a new concert hall. They wanted a classical-sounding piece with contemporary words, one that would reflect the new through the heart of the old. During the time he was ruminating about the title of the text, McCartney was invited to perform at St. Ignatius Loyola Church in New York City. While there, Paul’s eye was caught by a representation of the Crucifixion, beneath which was the Latin phrase, “*Ecce Cor Meum.*” He knew from his schoolboy Latin that the phrase means, “Behold my Heart.” These words were beneath the depiction of the cross of Christ, “Behold My Heart.” Let me show you what’s inside my heart, the things that are important to me. And so, this became the title of Paul McCartney’s work, “*Ecce Cor Meum,*” blending the old and classical, with the new.

This is what Jesus does. He counters the newer Mosaic allowance with the first words attributed to Moses, in Genesis, to show us God’s heart, God’s intention for marriage from the beginning of creation, before the fall, before human hearts had become hardened to God’s will for their life.

... [A] man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.

We hear these beautiful words at every wedding, reminding us of the mystical, unifying bond created by God. One that Jesus reminds us should not be broken by mere mortals. And yet, we know we do not live in that perfect world from the time before the fall of humanity. We live in a broken world where men and women sometimes suffer from a hardening of their hearts toward God’s will for their lives and toward each other.

Their hearts that used to see all that was good and perfect in their mate, that looked upon them the way God might, now only focus on the small flaws that appear. Family counselor Harville Hendrix reminds us of this. He calls it the 80/20 rule of marriage. He says when couples first marry they see 80% of all that is perfect in their mate, and while they see the 20% that is flawed, they are either willing to forgive the 20% or they think they can change it. But as time goes on, their hearts begin to focus on the 20% that is flawed, and the level of their thoughts and actions in the relationship sink to their level of their hearts. They develop heart disease. They need to start seeing one another through the heart of God again so their actions within their relationship rise to the level of their hearts. This rule doesn't just work in marriages; it can be applied to all of our relationships: With our children, friends, family members, coworkers.

Jesus strikes a blow for those who have been seen, up to this point, as second class citizens. In quoting the creation story, he reminds us that in God's eyes, and in God's heart we are all of equal worth and value and we should strive to continue seeing that worth in one another. And yet there are those who would take this text, especially those words relating to remarriage, perhaps not realizing that it is with these words that Jesus is trying to protect the vulnerable, and use it legalistically to trap the vulnerable.

Since October is VIP month, this is a good time to mention, this. I have a friend who, like most people, believed when she married it was "until death do us part," but the relationship became physically abusive, and when she went to her pastor for counseling, he used this text to send her back into a violent marriage, saying that perhaps if she would work on becoming a better wife, her husband wouldn't have to hit her. Halford Luccock reminds us that Jesus is not creating a new legalism. He is not becoming the new

Pharisee. He is shocking people out of their complacency with marriage; out of their desire to trade in on a new marriage partner like they would a new car.

The stories before this one in Mark, as well as the one after all have Jesus speaking of the Kingdom of God, that time when God would come and their would be a new creation, one where God's will for creation to live in peace would be realized . Jesus tells us in Mark that in him the Kingdom of God has come near. Biblical Scholar Morna Hooker aptly states that, "In affirming the principal set out in creation, Jesus is perhaps proclaiming that the time for the new creation has arrived" [in him].

So what does this mean for us as disciples today? For those of us whose aim is to live out the will of God in this time between the Old Creation and the New. To all of us, Jesus would say, "Behold My Heart."

In the gospel of Mark the cross of Christ, is paramount. No human being in Mark realizes that Jesus is the Son of God until they see him on the cross. Paul McCartney and the author of Mark have one thing in common; they both realize that it is from beneath the cross of Christ that we can best behold the heart of God.

It is from beneath the cross of Christ that we see the depth of God's love for us. It is from beneath the cross that we see the depth of Christ's compassion; for the thief, for the vulnerable, for the disciples who failed him. It is from beneath the cross that we see the depth of Christ's forgiveness toward those whose hearts are hardened toward him; "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." And it is in the resurrection that Jesus overcomes sin and death and gives us hope that in him our hearts can become like His. In Christ, we find that God does not only change our hearts, but he can, as the Psalmist says, put a new song in our heart.

For those contemplating marriage – ask yourself, is this God’s intention for our lives, do we plan to take God’s will for our marriage seriously? Or are you like a friend of mine who asked me a couple of months before the wedding if I thought she was doing the right thing (this is a dangerous position to be in). When I said, “I think your fiancé is a nice guy, but it doesn’t appear to me that you two have the same values or find the same things in life important,” she replied, “I know, but if it doesn’t work out, we’ll just get a divorce.” If you’re contemplating marriage, the song in your heart shouldn’t be “Fifty Ways to Leave Your Lover”, it should be, “Love You Forever and Forever.”

For those of us who live the “dailness” of marriage, beholding God’s heart can change our tune from “It’s Been a Hard Day’s Night” to “I Want to Hold Your Hand.”

For those whose marriages are extremely difficult, who may be considering divorce, ask God to behold your hearts to search them and see if by applying the 80/20 rule, you and your mate might be able to sing, “We Can Work it Out.” Sometimes this isn’t possible. My friend who was in the abusive marriage had to walk away for her safety and that of her children. She is fond of saying, “I am so glad I serve a God of second chances.” Had she been driving with us on our trip through west Texas, there is no doubt she would have sung “I Put the Gold Band on the Right Left Hand this Time.”

It is from beneath the cross that we can best behold the heart of God that makes us realize, for most of us, on most days, “There Really Ain’t Nothin’ in this House Worth Fightin’ Over.”