

Marriage: God's Solution to Loneliness, Lust and Laundry (Mark 10:2-16)

² Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?' ³He answered them, 'What did Moses command you?' ⁴They said, 'Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.' ⁵But Jesus said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. ⁶But from the beginning of creation, "God made them male and female."⁷ "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, ⁸and the two shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.'

¹⁰ Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. ¹¹He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; ¹²and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'

¹³ People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. ¹⁴But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. ¹⁵Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' ¹⁶And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Introducing the Theme: God's Solution to Loneliness, Lust and Laundry

- **Quote: We got married: society's solution to loneliness, lust and laundry (George Cockcroft)**
- **A health warning: Today may be tricky for some. For those who have lost loved ones and for those who are still in married and wondering why!**
- **Video: 2023 *Shrinking* - 01 - 05 - Marriage (Story of a jaded psychologist)**

Set in a Psychology Practice. One of the team has been couple counselling and they asked whether her advice worked in her own marriage. Of course she is divorced. She seeks the advice of her wiser head of the practice.

Past and present purpose of marriage... really!

- **Illustration: Your God Shall Be My God: Religious Conversion in Britain Today by Jonathon A. Romain's (ET 112:6 p. 183)**

A curious example of conversion: "*Linda openly admitted: Jewish men have reputation for being rich and successful, but also good husbands and fathers. Well, that's what I really wanted, and I decided that rather than hang around bars and discos, I should become part of the local Jewish community. In fact, it worked even better than I hoped. There I was, every male Jew's fantasy of a blonde bombshell, but 100% kosher with it. I was spoilt for*

choice. As for the religious side, lighting candles on a Friday night and going to synagogue every now and then is a small price to pay for an adoring husband and financial security."

I imagine how your everyday non-blonde bombshell Jewish woman would feel – ripped off."

Seven Deadly Sins of Marriage

Whatever we make of Jesus' take on marriage in Mark – it is a high view of marriage and it is no fluke that it is followed by the place of children. These verses have been weaponised unhelpfully and I have no intention of fuelling that – life is hard enough without such cheap shots. However, I think marriage is a calling – especially in so far as it works to propagate the species!

Jesus discussion about marriage is an occasion time to reminisce back to your own marriage or marriages

- or if you're not married to bring to mind your memories of celebrity marriages
- marriage can be a holy wedlock or an unholy deadlock so today I'd like to share with you the seven principles or if you prefer the seven deadly sins for marriage.

- **Video: 2023 *The Holdovers* - 1 – Marriage**

Story about a live-in master at a boarding school – joins the live-in cook to watch some TV: *The Newly Wed Game*

Show about how well couples know each other... that gonna end in disaster!

So, if you can forgive me – my whimsical take on the institution of marriage. The views I express today are mine and mine alone – they do not reflect the views of management ...or Sally!

1. Forgetting to take reality with you

- Marriage and children have always had high view in giving us insights in the Divine ways – this is the primary message in our passage from Mark today
- however, disillusionment only comes to those who start the journey with illusions
- Remember you marry your future - and if you forget this there may be a reminder because you get the children you deserve
- Granted the obligation to procreate is now dissipating – so staying together for the children is now at least anachronistic if not irrelevant
- However, with more marriages seeing children as optional the necessary levels of sobering disillusionment that is required to prosper in marriage may be narrowing!

2. Do not become boring

- Be careful lest you have a jaundiced marriage you can't afford

Illustration: *Generation X* (D. Coupland pp. 143) – horrid picture of turpitude

My friends are all either married, boring, and depressed; single, bored, and depressed; or moved out of town to avoid boredom and depression. And some of them have bought houses, which has to be kiss of death, personality-wise. When someone tells you they've just bought a house, they might as well tell you they no longer have a personality. You can immediately assume so many things: that they're locked into jobs they hate; that they're broke; that they spend every night watching videos; that they're fifteen pounds overweight; that they no longer listen to new ideas. It's profoundly depressing. And the worst part of it is that people in their houses don't even like where they're living. What few happy moments they possess are those gleaned from dreams of upgrading.

- Be warned - pick your life style with care - lest it bite the hand that feeds it - and the marriage it feeds upon

3. Advice for Husbands – Marriage is no place for Armchair feminism

- Yes, men have grasped that women's liberation is no longer deniable
- Some men are all for the equal status of women, feigning SNAG like sentiments but incapable (unwilling?) of cooking, washing, changing nappies, etc

4. Advice for Wives – Marriage is no place for Retro-feminism

- Yes, women have experienced some of the benefits of the liberation of women
- Yes, such women want their men to be sensitive, do the cooking, washing, child rearing, etc and also be the bread winner, fix the car, be decisive
- a 'greed is good I want it all view' - demanding the benefits of liberated as well as of pre-liberated womanhood
- The best of both the good new days and bad old days
- How quickly it is forgotten that it is not possible to be domestically oppressed and be the life of the party

5. Keep sharing yourself with your families

- I do not know, regardless of cultural heritage, folk mirror a disconcerting trend
- This is where adult children aim to visit and spend time with their families only during Xmas day and birthday parties
- Kind of cramming all the dysfunctionalities of our families into as few occasions as possible - this is to be avoided

- It makes for family reunions that resemble belated visits to the dentist - as we know regular visits to the dentist can spread the pain to more bearable levels
- It also helps your teeth last the distance

6. Careful with separate bank accounts

- Whatever is marriage it is not a partnership - a business arrangement
- Maybe this is my own little illusion but marriage is more than unfreezing assets but a commitment of sharing and co-owning of each other's assets
- Marriage is living not with a partner - but with mutuality and reciprocity
- This mirrors the living God of Jesus – the Father-Son-Holy Spirit - who is able to celebrate difference and a common identity

7. Divorce is bad for marriage

- Now what was the last one - yes - I read it somewhere - that's right - divorce I am told is bad for your marriage, some marriages never recover from it

- **Video: 2023 *The Holdovers* - 2 – Marriage**

Master drops in again and the cook is watching the *Newly Weds Game Show*

She observes “This Couple is gonna get divorced...”

- It is one of the annoying bits of research - when you show a couple to other people, they can work out whether a couple is going to work out just after a few seconds!
- Every worthwhile venture has the shadow of failure as its companion
- Never take for granted what you share
- I remember the advice my bemused hedonist scallywag cousin offered to us just prior to our wedding day
- Intrigued by us as an earnest virginal Christian couple he warned Sally and me to avoid pigging out on the honey
- Why - so that you don't lose the thrill - I think he meant marriage is about pacing yourself as much as anything else – passion and steady as you go
- It was interesting advice from someone who had never paced himself in anything in life but somehow knew it was to his own detriment
- Many a couple brags they have never had an argument - my response is either such people are lying or else one of them has crushed the other

- The essence of marriage is a call to peace and harmony where friction and struggle is as much your tutor as well as modes of romance
- Marriage is as much learning to fight fair & clean as much as celebrating a life shared
- The Hebrew word for marriage means cleave, adhere or stick to, which means that a husband and wife are united together through marriage
- They are not stuck with but to each other - yes divorce is bad for marriage

Theology of Marriage

- **Video: 2023 *The Holdovers* - 3 – Marriage**

The live-in master ponders why he has not married

Too spiritual for marriage... really!

- We have grown up with the notion that marriage is a ceremony and living together was a taboo that undermines marriage
- Nowhere is marriage defined by religious ceremony – people marry themselves and the state or religious bodies are witnesses and guard rails to affirm and protect
- Functionally it is when we take responsibility for bring joy to someone and responsibility for what emerges – children literally and metaphorically
- So, what is marriage – it is to become one - to become one flesh in Hebraic terms
- That means a lot more of children are married in the eyes of God than we think!

Conclusion

- So, marriage is a weird mixture of the mystical and the functional
- Nearly all relationships except perhaps for the most frivolous are more like marriage that less
- the Christian aspiration is that people in relationship aspire to become one
- True, the marriage of Christians is no guarantee of a “successful” marriage
- however, dare I say it – all marriages including the marriages of Christians do guarantee insight into the life offered by the God of Jesus

- **Video: *The Holdovers* - 4 – Dreams**

Master reflects on his dreams of travel and

The cook responds: “You can’t even dream a whole dream can you...?”

- The Hebraic / Christian tradition has a high view of marriage

- For marriage is one of the windows into the divine life that you ignore at your peril – the God of Jesus offers complex life not simple or sentimental life

Quote: Jean Varnier founder of L'Arche Communities for the disabled

“When one spouse’s light meets the other’s light there is joy.

When one spouse’s light meets the other’s darkness there is healing.

But when one spouse’s darkness meets the other’s darkness, they need God.”

- Marriage is one occasion which impresses on us that we all need times of joy, we all need times of healing, we all need times of rescue - we all need God
- Today’s reading from Mark is an opportunity for all of us to ponder and make our peace with the God of Jesus who would be our peace in times of joy, healing & rescue
- Jesus words on marriage and children prompts us– may the God of Jesus bless you with joy, healing and freedom with or without marriage – with or without children