

In seminary, I was told we should not talk about the sermon writing process as part of our sermon. The sermon is about God and not about the sermon or the person delivering the sermon. Yet it seems as if today's lesson calls for a special commentary on the sermon writing process. When I approach a sermon, one of the first things I think about is, where is the Good News in the lesson for today. In today's lesson, it can be particularly challenging to find the Good News.

To do this, I like to look at how we understand the lesson from the context of Israel in the time of Jesus, as well as in our current context. So, let's look for a moment at marriage. The idea of marriage has changed a lot since the time of Jesus. Today, we think of people marrying for love, not as an arranged marriage, a child marriage, but joining out of love.

This has opened up our approach to marriage. Back then, marriage was the joining of two families for the protection and welfare of women and children. Today, it is much more about the celebration of love and joining people together in the celebration of God's love. That's one of the reasons why come to accept same sex marriage. People of the same sex can and do love one another in the same way that people of different sexes do.

On the other hand, it is also why the divorce rate is what it is today. The first blush of love too often fades and we need something deeper to hold our marriages together. According to recent statistics, fifty percent of U.S. marriages end in divorce. My parents divorced, and it was painful. My first marriage ended in divorce and that was very painful.

The pain that I experienced, I suspect many of us have experienced, and many have experienced even greater pain. It is worth noting that October is Domestic Violence Awareness Month and there are many people in great pain because of bad marriages.

So, where's the good news in today's lesson? "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her." How do we approach this?

Another verse that jumps out at me is "God made them male and female". In these days, I wonder about people who do not identify as male or female. Perhaps their genetics is different, with three chromosomes, being neither male nor female, or those who do not feel that the gender assigned them at birth represents who they truly are. How do we approach this verse in a way that welcomes non-binary people?

Recently, I came across a quote that helped put this into perspective for me. You see, God did create humans male and female, just as God separated the day from the night. There is a fellowship and bible study group that I've been participating in. Eric Rennie is part of that group and he talked about the golden hour of the day, the first light, when everything is so beautiful. It is a reminder that it isn't clear cut that it is night and then its day. Instead, there is a wonderful transition from night to day and again from day to night at dusk, in the gloaming hour. There is a beauty, not only in the night and in the day, but also in everything in between.

Yes, we celebrated creation, and part of God's creation story is that God separated the dry land from the water. But we know that an important part of creation is the space between the dry land and the sea. The marsh lands, tidal waters, and estuaries are teeming with life and the beauty of God's creation.

As we think about the verse god made them male and female, we should think about some of the beauty in between.

So, where does all of this lead us? In today's passage, it leads us to Jesus talking about welcoming children. And, I'd like to invite you, for one moment, to close your eyes and think about how you envision these children. If you're like me, you're probably thinking about someone like Shirley Temple, blond curly hair and engaged in Sunday school. Yet again, that's not the context of New Testament Israel. If we look at the rule of children in Jesus's time, they were considered property of the master of the house; little better than slaves or animals. They were among the least privileged.

So, when we think about this verse about welcoming children, I invite you to think about the least privileged children of today. Those who have been separated from their families and placed in cages at the borders of our country. Those who have been separated from their countries as refugees, fleeing from countries like Afghanistan, Syria, or so many other war torn countries.

Perhaps, thinking more broadly of God's children, we should be thinking about those who are homeless, who suffer from substance use disorder, or who have been previously incarcerated. How do we welcome all of God's children?

Stephanie Spellers has a wonderful book called "Radical Welcome" and she asks this very question, pushing it to the boundaries. Do we welcome all of God's children by including them in committees, taking up leadership positions, maybe asking them to serve on the vestry?

Here in Connecticut, the Diocese is looking for a new bishop. Are we listening to the voices all of God's children, even those who are homeless, struggle with substance use disorder, or have previously been incarcerated? Would we consider selecting for our new bishop someone who has been divorced, who has been homeless, who has struggled with substance use disorder, or previously been incarcerated?

So, where do this leave us? I would like to suggest that this passage today about marriage and divorce is really about joining and separating. Yesterday, the Amistad visited Middletown. For those of you who don't know the story of the Amistad, it was a slave ship that in 1839, the slaves mutinied, and eventually the ship ended up in New Haven. There was then a trial about whether or not the slaves should be tried for murder, sold as cargo, or returned to their homeland. This trial became an important milestone in the efforts to abolish slavery in the United States. What can we learn from the history of the Amistad and what does it say about how we separate people or welcome them?

These were some of God's most vulnerable children. They were separated from their homeland and from their families for the personal gain of the slave traders. How do we separate people today for our personal gain and what is the alternative?

The alternative can be found in another event from yesterday. Yesterday, we gathered to remember Ann Ross. During the eulogies, people repeatedly spoke of her deep kindness and her great respect for every person and how she made people feel welcome here at Trinity.

This is, I believe, what today's Gospel is calling us to. We are to welcome one another, to welcome the most downtrodden and the most underprivileged. This is where we find the Good News in today's Gospel. We, in our brokenness, our divorces, in the ways we are hurt or lack privilege, experience God's love for us, God's welcome. It is this love, which made it possible for Ann to welcome others and makes it possible to do the same. God's welcome is even greater than the welcome Ann offered, and we would do well to be a little more like Ann and draw a little close to God in welcoming all God's children.

The collect for today reminds us that God is always more willing to give than we deserve or desire and to pour out on us abundant mercy on all of us. Amen.