

LOVE AND MARRIAGE

Mark 2:10-16

Kids, aged 5 to 10, were asked questions about what they thought of love and marriage. Here are some of the things they said.

- "My mother says to look for a man who is kind. That's what I'll do. I'll find somebody who's kinda tall and handsome." -- Carolyn, age 8
- "I'm not rushing into being in love. I'm finding fourth grade hard enough." -- Regina, age 10
- "Most men are brainless, so you might have to try more than once to find a live one." -- Angie, age 10
- "A man and a woman promise to go through sickness and illness and diseases together." - Marlon, age 10
- "Love will find you, even if you are trying to hide from it. I been trying to hide from it since I was five, but the girls keep finding me." -- Dave, age 8

Kids on kissing:

- "You should never kiss a girl unless you have enough bucks to buy her a big ring and her own VCR, cause she'll want to have videos of the wedding." -- Jim, age 10
- "I know one reason kissing was created. It makes you feel warm all over, and they didn't always have electric heat or fireplaces or even stoves in their houses." -- Gina, age 8

How People In Love Act:

- "It's love if they order one of those desserts that are on fire. They like to order those because it's just like how their hearts are -- on fire." -- Christine, age 9
- "See if the man picks up the check. That's how you can tell if he's in love." -- John, age 9

On deciding who to marry?

- "You got to find somebody who likes the same stuff. Like if you like sports, she should like it that you like sports, and she should keep the chips and dip coming." -- Allan, age 10

And the winner is....

- "No person really decides before they grow up who they're going to marry. God decides it all way before, and you get to find out later who you're stuck with." -- Kirsten, age 10

Jesus was travelling with his disciples down by the Jordan River – the place where his cousin John the Baptist was in ministry. As verse 2 indicates, there were some Pharisees in the group following Jesus who asked a question about divorce, hoping to trap Jesus into making a statement that would lead to his arrest. How did Mark know they were trying to trap Jesus? Didn't the Pharisees just want to know if Jesus was familiar with the Law? I will let you decide. You see, the ruler of the region was Herod Antipas who had imprisoned and finally beheaded

John the Baptist who had criticized Herod for marrying his brother's wife. (She had divorced her husband, so she could marry Herod.) When John leveled his reproach at Herod, he announced that the Messiah was expected to arrive at any moment. Now as Jesus goes to Jerusalem it is shortly after his disciples' recognition of him as Messiah (Mark 8:29), it really is not surprising that the Pharisees try to trap him. They are hoping Jesus will say something about divorce which can then be presented as a treasonable offense. Jesus, who knows they are trying to trip him up, instead directs their attention both to the Law of Moses and the creation story in Genesis.

The Pharisees have questioned him about the law: "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" (10:2). They want to know about the rules. Who can and who can't? And for what reasons? Jesus redirects them back to God's heart for marriage. The question shouldn't be "Is it lawful to divorce?" It should be "How can we be one flesh?" Jesus connects marriage to God's creation mandate when he recites Genesis. God originally made male and female (10:6). His plan was for daughters and sons to leave their families and unite into new families through marriage (10:7). Once again, the Pharisees were unsuccessful in trapping Jesus, and Jesus continues on his journey with his disciples. His disciples are curious and ask for a deeper explanation of his response to the Pharisees. And this is where Jesus utters verses 11 & 12: He told them, "A man who divorces his wife and marries someone else is unfaithful to his wife. A woman who divorces her husband and marries again is also unfaithful." More traditional texts use the word adultery instead of unfaithful as in: "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." Lifted directly from this passage without reading it within the full account of Mark 10 has caused much pain and often harm to persons stuck in an abusive marriage. Both women and men have stayed married to persons who regularly abused them body, mind, and spirit to avoid being labeled an adulterer... and Pastors have insisted they should do so! One pastor who followed me in one of my appointments was preaching from this passage one Sunday and told my former congregation that I was an adulterer because I had married a divorced man!

This is one of those Biblical passages that most pastors like to skip – I mean who wants to hear about divorce – particularly when so many of us work very hard at our marriages. Because of this, while I want to accurately represent what the Biblical text is saying – I decided to follow Jesus' example of shifting the focus from divorce prevention through marriage attention. Jesus doesn't want us concerned with whether or not we can pursue divorce. He wants us concerned with whether or not we are pursuing our marriage.

Let's hear a few more recommendations from the viewpoint of children on love:

- "Dates are for having fun, and people should use them to get to know each other. Even boys have something to say if you listen long enough." -- Lynnette, age 8
- "Tell your wife that she looks pretty even if she looks like a truck!" -- Ricky, age 7
- "Be a good kisser. It might make your wife forget that you never take out the trash." -- Erin, age 8

- "Sensitivity don't hurt." -- Robbie, age 8

What do other Biblical texts have to say about marriage? One of my favorite, comes from Ephesians 5:21-25, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so also wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands." Are you surprised this is a favorite? Well, stopping right here it would be my least favorite, and sadly this is where most wedding ceremonies end... verse 25 says: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." In other words, Husbands love your wives completely to the point you are willing to die for her!! Another favorite is Genesis 2:18 "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.'" His partner, his equal, his helpmate, his companion, someone to be cherished, not subjugated.

At this point, I would love to turn this into a conversation. There are many Marquis People who have been married for many, many years. Surely over the years we have learned what works for us and what doesn't! Every time we attend a wedding and hear marriage vows, it reminds us of the promises that we made the day we were married. And anyone who is honest about marriage will tell you that holding those vows takes effort. Selflessness. Choice. Growth. Compromise. So... what are some of the things you do that make your marriages work? I am going to ask you to stand and speak loudly so everyone can hear.

Another story - Alec is in love. He is so sure of his love, he's talking marriage. Alec is 3 years old; so, too, is his fiancée. They met in preschool. They place their little chairs next to each other during story time, swing together on the playground, and share the chocolate chips plucked from their cookies during snack time. Last week I picked up Alec at preschool, so we could go get an ice-cream cone before I took him home. I was eager to meet the potential little bride, so I asked Alec to point her out to me. Just as she was climbing into her mother's minivan, she turned, grinned at Alec, and called a warm "See ya." I must admit to being a trifle stunned to see that this dear little girl was exceedingly cross-eyed and wore very thick glasses. As we drove away Alec commented dreamily, "Isn't she beautiful?" So like God, I thought. We often say love is blind, but God's love sees all our imperfections and, like Alec, says, "Isn't she beautiful?"

One of the things Vern said to me before we married in response to my saying, "Oh I hope this never changes...speaking of being so in love." In his down to earth practical manner Vern said, "Of course it is going to change...(my heart sank)...it is going to get better!" One of the most important lessons I have learned is that both Vern and I continue to grow as persons. He is not the same person I married 35 years ago...like he said, he is his much better version of himself. If I were to ask him right now what is the single most important thing that has kept us growing together, Vern would point is finger heaven ward. God IS the glue which has kept us together. Vern and I are polar opposites in every other way.

Remember the love quote from Kirsten age 10? "No person really decides before they grow up who they're going to marry. God decides it all way before, and you get to find out later who you're stuck with." This is surely what happened for me and Vern. It was a cold December 18th in Vermont. Both of us had gone to our respective company Christmas parties. My party moved from my boss's home to a nightclub across the way from the movie theater where I moonlighted. Vern's volunteer fire department party ended up in the same place. There we found each other. I was madly trying to find someone to dance with – and for some reason every married man I asked turned me down!! Suddenly from behind I hear, "You look like you are looking for someone to dance with." Without turning around, I said, "Yes!" and made a beeline for the dance floor. When I turned around my eyes met the middle of his chest and I had to tip my head way back to get to his cowboy hat topped face! Like a junior high dance, we exchanged not a single word but danced together the rest of the night. We did, however, exchange names at the end of the night. Being that Stowe is a huge tourist town and Vern was dressed head to toe in Cowboy regalia, I had pegged him for a tourist. However, when he told me his name, pure Vermont woodchuck came out of his mouth! We went on our first date the third week of January. When he dropped me off at my apartment, I got down on my knees beside my bed and prayed, "God, this is not exactly what I had in mind. So I am guessing he is from you. IF he is from you, I am going to go for it. If he is not, then stop it immediately." We were married 6 months from the day we met, and here we are 35 years later. Has it been easy? Heck no! Would I do it all over again? In a heartbeat.

In closing hear the words from the Song of Solomon and 1Corinthians 13:

Song of Solomon 8:6-7: "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised."

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

"Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Now, may God bless you with hope enough to keep morning in your love, and fear enough to keep you holding hands in the dark. May he grant you unity enough to keep your roots entwined, and separation enough to keep you reaching for each other. May he give you harmony enough to keep romance in your song, and discord enough to keep you tuning your love. May God, the Eternal keep you in love with each other so that the peace of Christ may abide in your home.