

Sermon: 19<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Text: Mark 10:2-16

Theme: The role of the family in God's plan

Goal: To reinforce the family and the Christian education of the children in God's salvation plan.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: What is the role of the family in our society? It seems that for the vast majority job, career, wealth, personal ambitions are at the center of life at the expenses of the family. The houses are just places to sleep in, not homes any more. This tendency is spreading among many couples. What are the consequences of such a behavior on the relationship between the couples and on the education of the children?

I – The original plan of God

Jesus is questioned about divorce issues by the Pharisees. In His answer, He goes back to the beginning, to God's original plan. Quoting Genesis 1 and 2, He affirms: “But at the beginning of creation God ‘made them male and female.’ ‘For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.’ So they are no longer two, but one flesh.” God had good plans for Adam and Eve and for the entire humankind. He wanted people's happiness, and man and wife should be complementary to each other and live together all life long. This was the original situation in the paradise.

Can we work on this original plan of God again? Sure we can! Jesus came to restart, first, a good relationship between humankind and God through the reconciliation He conquered by His death and resurrection; and, second, to restore a good relationship between people, beginning with husband and wife in the family. We are new creation in Christ, living not under the slavery of devil and sin any

more, but under God's love and blessing in His kingdom. The new life in Christ *involves a reordering of life and relationships* (Series B 237). Is it perfect so? Unfortunately no...

## II – The fallen experience of humankind

We are not in Paradise anymore. Even as Christians, we still have the Old Adam in us, who is tempting us all the time to disobey God's will. We know the struggle that goes on daily inside us. What was planned to be good and perfect turns into a burden for many.

Some couples don't make efforts to build up a good and permanent relationship between husband and wife; and it has become very simple and common to get divorced. Does divorce bring any advantage to the couple and to the children? I read in a research that divorce comes second to the death of a beloved one on the list of causes of depression and distress.

Jesus was questioned about divorce by the Pharisees because it was an issue of that time as well, actually since Moses' time. Has Jesus got a new teaching about it? No, He hasn't. After stating how it was in the beginning, Jesus commented on Moses' Law and said that Moses had to regulate it “because your hearts were hard”; this means: because of the sinful nature of humankind. *Divorce was an accommodation to human weakness and was used to bring order in a society that had disregarded God's will, but it was not the standard God had originally intended. The purpose of Moses' Law (Dt 24:1) was not to make divorce acceptable, but to reduce the hardship of its consequences.* (Concordia SSB 1521).

As any other sin, divorce has to be avoided; couples have to look for help if their relationship is in a crises, forgiving each other as God forgives us in Jesus Christ. As any other sin, divorce has to be handled by the church with a strong call to repentance and with forgiveness. The experience shows that many divorces could have been avoided if the couple searched for help in time. The church is here to help everyone.

### III – The children

The innocent victims of a divorce are the children. It is not by chance that the beautiful text of Jesus blessing the children comes immediately after the teaching of Jesus about divorce and God's will for a couple. Jesus loves the children and nobody and nothing shall impede or hinder the children to come to Jesus.

Jesus was so busy teaching the disciples and helping people that the disciples thought it is a waste of time for Jesus to receive the children whom the parents were bringing to Him. The disciples began to rebuke the parents and sent them away with their children. “When Jesus saw this, He was indignant! He said to them: Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these...And He took the children in his arms, placed His hands on them and blessed them.” This is one of the most beautiful and loveliest picture of Jesus' ministry.

I said some weeks ago when we had the baptism of little Nandi, that the children cannot come by themselves to the baptism. They cannot come alone to the church. They need to be brought by their parents and grandparents. They love to come to the Sunday School. Why are they not always here? If it was up to them, they would be here every Sunday, I am sure. Don't hinder them, dear parents. When they grow up, they will say what they had heard from their parents: Oh, we don't need to go to the church every Sunday... once a month is enough...

In many cultures in the past and nowadays the children are seen only as “little adults”, “non completed people”. For Jesus, a child is a person by itself, loved by God and member of His Kingdom. In our society, the children are hyper valued, sometimes too much if we compare with the time when we were children. But, anyway, the children have a big value to Jesus and He wants to bless them with His blessings of forgiveness and eternal life through the Baptism and through His Word. Jesus loves to take our children in His arms and to bless them!

*Martin Luther had a big concern not only about pure theology, but about godly Christian life as well. One of his big concerns was about the education of the children. Not only boys, but girls as well, have to go to school. Parents have the obligation to send their children to school and government has the obligation to offer good education to the children. Girls have to have the opportunity to learn to read and to write; if not, how can they educate their future children if they themselves are illiterate?* (Newsletter Oct-Dec 2012). This was something totally new at his time and Luther is recognized worldwide as an expert in education. One of Luther's goals to educate the children in the school was to give them opportunity to read the Bible and to grow in their Christian faith. Luther also wrote the Catechism to help parents to educate their children according to the will of God.

We are working on a curriculum for the Sunday School for next year based on the Small Catechism. *Each Sunday has a Bible Story that matches a part of the Small Catechism. The children will memorize the main parts of the Catechism and some Bible Verses, and parents are asked to follow up with their children on the Sunday School lesson. We are planning to give one Small Catechism to each family with children, so that the parents and grandparents can prepare themselves for the follow up.* (Newsletter Oct-Dec 2012).

Conclusion: It was said in the past that *the families are the base of the society*. Is it still so? As Christians we have to guide our families and our children to do the will of God, not just follow the tendency of a post-modern society, that emphasize selfishness and personal goals at the expenses of the collectivity and of the common good. This tendency affects our families and children as well and we need to be aware and alert not to be contaminated with this bad influence. As church, we are a family, God's family by the grace of Jesus and by the work of the Holy Spirit. Jesus still takes our children into His arms to bless them, and God guides us on the right paths of His love and hope. Don't despise this resource of blessings, but enjoy it for your good and for the good of your family. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle, Cape Town, 07 October 2012