

Ann robinson

Reader

When I first read the readings selected for today I was not impressed! Did I totally ignore the difficult part about divorce, feeling that it is very harsh? Or did I look at a more general interpretation about relationships? Either way, it was a tough decision!

But let's begin with a bit of context. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem, knowing that his death was looming. The Pharisees wanted to trap him and asked yet another difficult question, one which was a problem then. This question was asked beside the River Jordan which was where John the Baptist had carried out much of his work in preparing the way of the Lord. John was beheaded because he criticised Herod Antipas for marrying his brother's wife after divorce. Moses had allowed divorce because the people were finding it so hard to live up to ideals.

In the ancient Mediterranean world, marriages were between families with the event negotiated between the male heads of the families. Women had no choice in what happened to them as they were regarded as chattels. In the event of a divorce shame was brought to the family and feuds would result which could lead to deaths.

Jesus was showing that women matter and later that children did too. In Genesis man was made in God's image and he was given a companion because he needed someone to support him and there was equality. God said that his creation was good and Christ believed in the original goodness of people. The Eastern Orthodox church believed the teaching of Ireneous who said that all people were bearers of God's image and like flowers in bud , waiting to be coaxed into full bloom by God's love; a beautiful picture.

We used to talk about children who came from a broken home and I think the important word is broken. We know the ideals of

relationships but we are humans who find it difficult to live up to the ideal. We are broken in so many ways but Christ is with us to hold us and mend us. I have seen so many family and friends suffer the heartache and pain and desolation of difficult relationships, not just marriage but in friendships which flounder. We so often are unable to live up to the ideal.

The second part of the reading is about mothers bringing their children to Jesus. The disciples were trying to protect Jesus as they knew he was tired and although they did not understand what would happen there was a sense of foreboding. Why does this episode follow so closely on the previous one? We have heard before that we need to be like children, not the truculent part but the innocence. Children come with empty hands and trusting hearts and we need to stand before God with their purity , with arms reaching out.

As we grow we inevitably lose those good qualities of a child.

Wordsworth wrote: Heaven lies about us in our infancy. The

disciples thought that the children had nothing to offer; they had no status, no power and no wealth. They were vulnerable and dependent and Jesus knew that this was the way that everyone needs to come to God. The children were the best example of the kingdom of God.

God gave us everything that he created and in so many ways we let him down. We don't look after the earth properly, the wonderful world which so many of us have learned to appreciate even more during the last few months. But we don't look after each other always and it is easy to lose touch with people and relationships are broken, sometimes simply because we don't think we have time. And often we don't look after ourselves; we worry and fret and yet forget that Christ has walked this way before us. He knew about the earth; remember the Sermon on the Mount about the lilies of the field. He knew about looking after others; before this episode in Mark, Jesus has spent time healing the leper, a paralytic, a man with a withered hand, a demoniac, a little girl and

a woman, a Gentile woman's daughter, a deaf man, a blind man, and a little boy. He had improved life for so many. He knew the heartache when things go wrong with those closest because Judas, one of the trusted inner circle betrayed him and his friends ran away. He knew despair and loneliness; he understood about being broken.

Where does that leave us? Peter G. van Breemen, a German theologian who has written many books and lead retreats in Bingen has given the answer to this question in a way that I never could. He wrote in his book “As Bread that is Broken”:

‘I am accepted by God as I am—as *I am*, and not as I should be...He loves me with my ideals and disappointments, my sacrifices and my joys, my successes and my failures. God is himself the deepest Ground of my being. It is one thing to know I am accepted and quite another thing to realise it. It is not enough to have but just once touched the love of God. There is more

required to build one's life on God's love. It takes a long time to realise that I am accepted by God as I am.'

And we will let St Matthew have the last word: I am with you always, to the end of the age. Amen.