

“Create Space, Articulate the Hurt, Confession and Forgiveness”

Mark 10:2-12

In last week’s gospel text the disciple John is jealous and angry because an unknown man is doing healing ministry in the name of Jesus. Jesus accepts the unknown man’s ministry as legitimate and teaches John and us that we need to create more space in our lives for God to work. We need to create space for Jesus working through the words of our stewardship Temple Talkers to move us in supporting our Divinity ministry together. We create space for God to work. We also need to create space within ourselves for the Holy Spirit to work. We step back from the clutter and busyness of our lives and create space for solitude and silence. Create space to be alone with God and to know he is God.

The first step to opening ourselves to the healing ministry of Jesus Christ is to create space for God to work in our lives. Once we create space for God, then we articulate the hurt, we talk about our pain, which results in confession and forgiveness.

Now, what does healing, what does creating space, articulating the hurt, and confession and forgiveness have to do with this morning’s gospel text which deals with marriage and divorce? We tend to think of healing in terms of broken arms and legs and the healing of physical illnesses that have physical causes. We need to be reminded that sickness has physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual causes. When a marriage is in trouble and divorce is being contemplated, it should be

treated like a sickness that has many causes – physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual causes.

When the marriage relationship begins to fall apart, in many ways it is not unlike a disease attacking a part of the body. We need to find the causes. Taking medication to relieve the symptoms of the illness is not enough. The causes of the illness need to be found and if possible, eliminated. Does it help to create space and to open ourselves to the healing ministry of Jesus Christ? Is it possible to find the cause of the illness if we create space for God and then articulate the hurt?

Jesus knew how important it was to create space and then to put the pain into words. He often took people aside and then asked them questions. He asked blind Bartimaeus what it was that he wanted, even though it was obvious. Jesus wanted him to say it. Jesus asked the man who sat at the pool of Bethsaida for 28 years if he really wanted to be healed. The woman with the 12 year flow of blood touched Jesus, was healed then articulated “the whole truth of her life”. Jesus asked those in need of healing to articulate clearly the pain and brokenness. Then he listened.

In a marriage relationship that is hurting, how do we go about creating space and articulating that hurt? First, we look for the causes and realize that each of us brings differences into the relationship that can potentially cause pain.

What are your differences? We are male and female, man and woman which often degenerates into stereotypes of superiority and inferiority. Just the

difference between being a man and woman can keep us from understanding one another and can cause hurt to the marriage.

Maybe one spouse was raised in a family that was emotionally close and helped one another out while the other was raised in a family where each fended for him/herself and to ask for help was a sign of weakness and dependence. Two different ways of being raised, different role models for parents can cause hurt to the marriage.

These are just two examples of hundreds of differences that can be brought into a marriage that may cause hurt and conflict. In the face of these differences we have three options.

First, we could learn from each other's differences and begin to incorporate the differences into our own beings. In other words, each spouse take the loved attributes of the other and make them a part of yourself – a growing together over the years of marriage. The writer of Genesis describes it as “becoming one flesh”.

A second option would be to let each other be, which at best means respecting the other's individuality while maintaining one's own uniqueness. There is no incorporating of the other's attributes. Some marriages work very well this way and some don't.

The third option is to reject the other by neither learning from nor respecting the partner's differentness. It is this third option when spouses reject one another's differentness rather than learning from it or respecting it, that leads to a growing

apart over the years and eventually divorce. It is this option that Jesus confronts in our gospel text.

The Pharisees approach Jesus and ask him a question of law that they themselves cannot agree upon. “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” The Pharisees accepted divorce as lawful based on the Deuteronomy text where Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to put her away. What the Pharisees could not agree on was what were acceptable grounds for divorce. The stricter school only allowed divorce in the case of the wife’s infidelity while the more liberal school allowed a man to divorce his wife for almost any reason. If she cooked a bad dinner, if he found someone more attractive, if she was a “brawling woman” which was defined as a woman who could be heard in the next house. I’ve heard some brawling women over the years!

Jesus responds to the Pharisees by saying Moses gave them this law allowing divorce because the people were unteachable, they were unwilling to learn. They liked to choose the third option of rejecting one another’s differentness rather than learning from and respecting one another.

Jesus tells them they cannot start with Deuteronomy where Moses is dealing with a sinful people but should go back to the beginning in Genesis to find what God has intended for man and woman.

Jesus quotes from Genesis, “But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and

be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.”

By quoting these passages Jesus is elevating marriage by way of leading people to understand it not as a remote ideal, but as a gift of God’s creation that is to be received gladly and celebrated.

Celebration happens when over the years the two become one; when the two incorporate one another’s attributes and learn from respect one another. Many marriages then and now are not characterized by celebration, learning, and respect, but by hurt, conflict, and rejection. Space is not created for God and the pain is not spoken, not articulated. The questions are not asked.

Are the decisions made by one person or do you make joint decisions based on discussion and contact? Are the spouses lying to one another, deceiving one another? Trust is the most important ingredient of love. When deliberate lying takes place, the developing separation is far along the way to the point of no return.

Is there a feeling of being trapped, of hopelessness in the marriage? If there is, the resulting stress will express itself in different addictions like overworking, overeating, alcoholism, and overusing drugs. Physical illnesses result. Usually when the separation gets this far along, the sexual relationship has either ceased or is very rare. The rituals of attachment – locating and watching, reaching out to,

touching, holding have been replaced by an opposite set of rituals – not knowing where the other is, withdrawing from bodily contact, pushing the other away, striking, avoiding the sight and sound of the other. In public, these signs can be noticed by friends, and they are especially noticed by a counselor or observant pastor.

Eventually the burdens and stresses of the growing separation causes one to involve a third person – maybe a relative, a close friend, a counselor or pastor. Eventually the couple are known by their friends and relatives to be “having trouble” which results in more physical and social separation.

These signs of separation, these hurts in a marriage need to be recognized and talked about. We need to articulate clearly the pain and brokenness if there is to be any chance for healing. James tells us in 4:3, “You ask and do not receive because you ask wrongly.” I’d add to that, “or because you do not ask at all.” Create space for God in your life and then articulate the hurt.

Jesus finishes this text with two very radical verses. “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her, and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery”.

These are radical words in Jesus’ first century for two reasons. First, a husband could never commit adultery against his wife, no matter what he did. Now Jesus says he can. Second, a woman could not divorce her husband, only the husband could divorce the wife. Jesus says, “If she divorces her husband”.

Giving that much power to a woman who was considered no more than a piece of property, was extremely radical.

What is Jesus saying to us, in these verses? For centuries Christians have pointed to these two verses and asked the question, “Is Jesus pointing to remarriage as the unpardonable sin?”

I respond to that question and these verses by talking about the third step in opening ourselves to the healing power of Jesus Christ. Create space, articulate the hurt, and third, the act of confession and forgiveness.

Yes, Jesus gives us a teaching concerning the intention of God in creation for the union of man and woman in the one flesh relationship of marriage. Yes, as a Christian pastor I support that ideal for marriage. Yet we are called upon as sinful men and women to minister to sinful men and women. Sinful men and women in the marriage relationship are not always going to be teachable and open to becoming one flesh. Many times divorce becomes inevitable just as remarriage becomes inevitable.

In the midst of our sin, our brokenness, and the sickness of our lives we need to constantly remind ourselves over and over again of forgiveness – the central and all important biblical concept of forgiveness. Unconditional forgiveness as a gift from Jesus nailed to the cross.

Create space, articulate the hurt, and then confess our sins no matter what they are and there will be forgiveness. For there is no unpardonable sin when

faithfully brought before Jesus.

In the life of Jesus, healing flowed from his loving and forgiving in his interaction with people and in the stories and parables he told. Even from the cross his words, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do”.

Confession and forgiveness are realities that transform us individually and corporately. Over and over again in scripture we are challenged to confess our sins to God and to one another and then to pray for one another that we might be healed. The absence of confession and forgiveness blocks the healing process.

When praying for healing, whether it be a physical illness or a relationship that is hurting; when opening ourselves to the healing power of Jesus Christ; create space for God to work in your life, articulate the hurt, speak the pain, confess your sins and ask for forgiveness.

Our lives are broken and in need of healing. Take it to God for healing and peace.

#603 - God, When Human Bonds Are Broken