

“Messes”

The Rev. Dr. Barbara Edema, Bridge Pastor
Sunday, October 7, 2018

****This sermon wasn't preached exactly as written on Sunday. It morphed throughout the week as we witnessed troubling events in our country. ****

Psalm 26; Mark 10:2-16

I love to bake. Sometimes it's for fun, sometimes I stress-bake.

This week I stress-baked.

When I bake, I clean as I go. I put used ingredients away, wipe counters, load the dishwasher with used baking tools, and keep my kitchen tidy.

I have friends who do the opposite. If we bake together flour flies, ingredients are everywhere, and finally, when the baking is completed, there is one grand clean-up.

Maybe I'm a little OCD. But I hate a sink full of dishes staring up at me.

If I could do this with my life, it would be fantastic. Clean as I go. I do what I can, but there are some messes that are easily cleaned, some that aren't, and a sometimes stain linger.

This passage from Mark comes around every three years in the lectionary. Every three years I tell myself I don't have to preach on it if I don't want to. There are other passages. I'll pick one of those.

I don't like it because my parents were divorced, and I am divorced and remarried to a man who is also divorced.

Next Saturday I will officiate a wedding in Lansing. I love weddings. I love working with couples in pre-marital counseling and then help them plan their ceremony. But I know that for all the marriages I officiate, somewhere around half of them aren't going to make it. I have heard of some of these divorces. It breaks my heart. No matter how hard we worked at the front end, some relationships end.

They are messy and stained and sometimes full of vindictiveness and sadness and regret.

Messes. We all have them. We all make them. We are messy people. It's because we are human that our biggest messes are most often relational. We make mistakes with our kids, our parents, our friends, and our spouses. We say and do things that linger, like the smell of cooked broccoli from two days ago.

In Mark's gospel, some Pharisees are trying to trip Jesus up, again. This is their pettiness going up against his power. "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"

They go back and forth with the law of Moses and the fact that a man could write a certificate of divorce at any time for any reason. If his wife burned the fish. If a prettier girl walked by. If he

was bored. He could divorce for more serious reasons, such as adultery, or breaking of another law.

The thing is, the woman had no recourse and she had no power to write a certificate of divorce herself. No matter what the guy did. She was often left to beg for food or prostitute herself.

No, this is not a great law of Moses.

Jesus reframes the question and argument by focusing on marriage instead of divorce. By quoting scripture from Genesis, “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.”

I would like to affirm here that marriage is not just about one man and one woman. Marriage is represented by any two people who love one another.

Jesus immediately elevates the standing of the woman by quoting the Genesis verses. Marriage is a uniting of two individuals, not a man and his property. Marriage is a relationship that must be nurtured by the two people who have made vows. One is not expendable by the other.

His words about divorce and remarriage and the resulting adultery are not easy words to read or completely understand. But once again, Jesus gives the power to do this to both men and women. They can both sin equally. Oh dear.

We can perhaps see where the Catholics came up with annulments. They had to erase marriages so that people could be free to marry again. That’s a tricky little business!

The messiness of divorce can linger for years. The stain of grief or hate can be stubbornly unmovable. Each story of divorce is different, each level of pain someone’s personal story. It can be as horrific as abuse, or as benign as boredom with the relationship.

Jesus wants us to live in marriage with a partner we will cherish and protect. Jesus wants us to live with other humans with love and respect.

And here is a little Good News. Jesus goes from his marriage monologue to children. Children are the other people in this story, along with women, who have no value in the culture. They too are property. They disturb life. While the disciples are laser-focused on the divorce/adultery issue, they are also telling parents to take their pesky children away. They want to talk to Jesus about what really matters: marriage messes.

Jesus became indignant. That’s the word, friends. **Indignant. “Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, will never enter it.”**

Then he blessed the children.

Children can certainly be messy. They are messy when they play, messy when they encounter any kind of weather, messy when they eat things. But it’s not hard to clean up after them as we go. It’s not hard to teach them to put toys away or wash their hands.

Dunking them in a warm bubble bath before putting them in their clean jammies can wash away all the fun and the mess of any given day.

Children believe what we tell them, blossom under love and our undivided attention, and openly accept goodness.

Jesus says that we have to be like children to get into heaven. We must live with openness and accept his grace and peace and promises of being completely loved.

Our country and our world are messy places right now. Our government is deciding that women and children don't matter. That women and children shouldn't be listened to. Women and children are of no consequence. It's been a rough week.

Of course, all of history is full of the messes of humanity. From our most personal relationships, to connections with other races, religions and countries, we are called to cherish and treasure our brothers and sisters in Christ. The work is hard and difficult and messy. But that is our calling.

Jesus didn't fall into the mess the Pharisees tried to set for him. We don't have to fall into the mess of our country or the world and be immobilized. We will clean as we go.

I think the biggest messes in this world are the ones when human beings are marginalized, ignored, shunned, dehumanized. Jesus knew that women and children were not property. They were made in God's image, and therefore, priceless. Wherever he went, no matter who was trying to catch him in something that broke the Mosaic law, Jesus stepped aside, and raised people up out of their darkness.

That's what we get to do too. We are able to lift up, clean up, hold up, clear up, and make humanity matter.

Like our psalmist said this morning we can cry out: "Do not sweep me away with sinners, nor my life with the bloodthirsty, those in whose hands are evil devices, and whose right hands are full of bribes. But as for me, I walk in my integrity; redeem me and be gracious to me. My foot stands on level ground; in the great congregation I will bless the Lord."

The Good News is this: we have a God who knows how to clean up any mess. We have a God who gets out every stain and wipes away every pain. We have a God who cleans as we go. A God who forgives and is all for second chances. A God who wants us to enter in to relationships with all the goodness we have to give, and to love deeply, because we are so deeply loved.

We are washed clean.

We can leave this place today and know that we are in solidarity with a world full of mess-makers and a world full of people gathering around communion tables sharing bread and cup and solidarity in the name of Jesus Christ. Because of that, we will go forward. We will walk with integrity, we will make messes, embrace our messes, and clean-up all we can wherever we can. God's clean-up plan is a redemption plan. There isn't a mess we can make that won't get tidied up by our faithful, just, loving God. Today he pulls the world together around the communion table. We'll begin with a holy meal. This is definitely not stressed baked. Then we're back out there in our messy world. Cleaning as we go. Amen.