

# **Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost**

**TUNED OUT, TUNED IN**

**Mark 10:2-16**

## **Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost Analysis by Chris Repp**

2 Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?' 3He answered them, 'What did Moses command you?' 4They said, 'Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.' 5But Jesus said to them, 'Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. 6But from the beginning of creation, "God made them male and female." 7"For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, 8and the two shall become one flesh." So they are no longer two, but one flesh. 9Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.'

10 Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11He said to them, 'Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; 12and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.'

13 People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. 14But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. 15Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.' 16And he took them up in his arms, laid

his hands on them, and blessed them.

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## **DIAGNOSIS: Out of Touch**

**Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem)** : *Testy (Testing, testing... Can you hear me?)*

The two episodes that are combined in this pericope seem, at first glance, to have nothing to do with one another, nor perhaps with us. A second look reveals that they have everything to do with each another, and maybe us too. Both the disciples and the Pharisees are “testy.” The Pharisees test Jesus to see if they can catch him in a contradiction. They’ve been out to get him since chapter 3. Are they also testy about John the Baptist’s preaching against marital irregularities, and Jesus’ association with him (chapters 1 and 6)? They already know the answer to their question. They have the law on their side, and they feel justified in their practice of dismissing their wives. Jesus knows this, it seems, because he’s the one who brings up the law. (Who’s testing whom?)

The disciples also probably feel justified in their testy dismissal of the children brought to Jesus. They are part of Jesus’ inner circle, and they know that Jesus should not be bothered by such triviality. Jesus is about serious stuff. He’s for grown-ups. And so they run interference.

**Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem)** : *Hard-Hearted (Faulty Receivers)*

The Pharisees have cited the appropriate precedents and await what must surely be a ruling in their favor. But they are out of touch. This guy Jesus, it turns out, is not a strict constructionist. He wants to talk about legislative intent! And that intent reflects badly on them, the testers. The law that they think justifies their practice was made as a concession to

their heart trouble, their cardiosclerosis (sclerocardia, actually, in the Greek).

The disciples are having a similar problem—bad reception: an unwillingness to receive those whom God would embrace and bless.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) :** *Cut Off (Loss of Signal)*

Arteriosclerosis has underlying causes: bad diet and lack of exercise among them. The underlying cause of cardiosclerosis is God (so says Exodus). Separation from God's good intention for the creation carries deadly consequences, which no amount of legal wrangling will avoid.

Likewise, the disciple's problem with reception results from a loss of signal from God. Has God stopped broadcasting, or are they just tuned to the wrong station? Either way, like the pilot in New York last month who dialed in the wrong frequency before hitting a tourist helicopter, the results are deadly.

## **PROGNOSIS: Tuned In**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) :** *Reconnected*

From the beginning, says Jesus, God created us for life—life with God and with one another. It is God who formed us from lifeless clay, who joins us together in marriage, forms our inmost parts and knits us together in our mothers' wombs (Ps. 139). And it is God who makes life out of our mortal separation from God by joining us to the one who endures the deadly consequence of that separation on our behalf. Like those awkward, ugly antennas on our houses, the cross of Christ—awkward and ugly—reestablishes our reception, tunes us back in to God.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) :** *Receptive*

With our reception reestablished, we become—no surprise

here–receptive. Not only are we in touch with God’s good intentions for us, we are open to the world God so loves. Rather than seeing others as disposable, or an annoyance, we are open to loving them as God loves them, to be invested in their lives as God in Christ is invested in ours.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *On the Air***

No longer running interference for Jesus—or creating interference for ourselves—we, like Abraham, know ourselves to be blessed in order to be a blessing to others, embraced by our Lord so that we may embrace others. We become relay stations for God’s message of repentance and forgiveness. And in place of the old diet that gave us cardiosclerosis, we partake of and share–broadcast, even–the new diet of the “word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4, Deut. 8:3) together with the bread of life.