

Based on Mark 10:2-16

October 7, 2018

As I am beginning this sermon, I'm conscious that I'm speaking to you, as a woman, daughter, sister, mother, pastor. As a woman deeply in touch with the abuse and oppression that many women experience... I would like to begin by asking you a question...Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves? (baptismal vow).

Certainly, a very challenging question, and a question we might face every day of our lives. One dimension of the freedom and power God gives us is to be a person who live lives of mutual respect, cooperation, seeking the welfare of all, building relationships of love and care for one another, affirming one another. This is a life-giving power because it strengthens relationships and promotes equal participation of all people. But quite often we are in the bondage of a different king of power that dominates the world, our communities, our own families and often ourselves.

Something is happening to us!

Our communities, our families, and our countries are so divided, so polarized in so many ways...

According to the Family Violence Prevention Fund, "growing up in a violent home may be a terrifying and traumatic experience that can affect every aspect of a child's life, growth and development. . . children who have been exposed to family violence suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as bed-wetting or nightmares, and are at greater risk than their peers of having allergies, asthma, gastrointestinal problems, headaches and flu." In addition, women who experience physical abuse as children are at a greater risk of victimization as adults, and men have a far greater (more than double) likelihood of perpetrating abuse.

Statistical studies indicate that one in every three women and also numerous men will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime. Reports indicated that many Thousands, more likely millions, of women and girls have been re-living the pain of their own sexual

harassment, assault, abuse, or rape, during these past weeks of national media attention to these crises in our society.

In the Gospel of Mark this morning, Jesus strongly bringing women and children to the center of the community life defending their dignity.

When the Pharisees raise a legal or moral question to Jesus to test him. «*Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?*». Jesus didn't get into the rabbinical arguments or a legal judgment on divorce, but instead turns the question on its head, shifting the conversation from legal to relational dimension as he seeks protection for women. His invitation is to discover God's original project, which is above laws and norms. Concretely this law reflected the power of husband over their wives in display because of the hardness of heart of the husbands.

Jesus goes deeper into the original mystery of the human being. Jesus said to them,...God «*made them male and female*». **Both have been made in equality.** God hasn't created the man with power over the woman. God hasn't created the woman to be subject to the man. Between men and woman there's not to be domination of any kind.

From this original structure of being human, Jesus offers a vision of marriage that goes way beyond all that's established by the Law.

In one sentence: Jesus ethical answer to the Pharisees question is in defense of dignity for women.

More than 2000 years later, the moral and ethical issue regarding marriage and divorce continue to be of major concern for the church and society. The United Methodist Church has giving a long consideration to this concern addressing it through the United Methodist church book of discipline which states

God's plan is for lifelong, faithful marriage... However, when a married couple is estranged beyond reconciliation, even after thoughtful consideration and counsel, divorce is a regrettable alternative in the midst of brokenness. We grieve over the devastating emotional, spiritual, and economic consequences of divorce for all

involved, understanding that women and especially children are disproportionately impacted by such burdens...

We affirm with Scripture the common humanity of male and female, both having equal worth in the eyes of God. We reject the erroneous notion that one gender is superior to another, that one gender must strive against another, and that members of one gender may receive love, power, and esteem only at the expense of another. We especially reject the idea that God made individuals as incomplete fragments, made whole only in union with another. We call upon women and men alike to share power and control, to learn to give freely and to receive freely, to be complete and to respect the wholeness of others. We seek for every individual opportunities and freedom to love and be loved, to seek and receive justice, and to practice ethical self-determination. We understand our gender diversity to be a gift from God, intended to add to the rich variety of human experience and perspective; and we guard against attitudes and traditions that would use this good gift to leave members of one sex more vulnerable in relationships than members of another.

The ministry of Jesus signifies a rupture with the prevalent situation of domination with the introduction of a new type of relationship, founded not in the patriarchal order of subordination, but in love as mutual giving, that includes the equality of the man and the woman. The women and children emerge as persons, daughters and children of God, protagonist and subject of the dream of Jesus, and invited, along with man, to be members of the new type of humanity.

Our gospel passage also affirms Jesus concern for the children. Children were very important part of Jesus ministry. We are kindly aware of the crisis of children in our nation, their health, education, too often abuse, hunger, victims of conflicts in the family and society. We are also aware of the 1700 lost children placed in tents, cut off from parents/family in isolated area of TX.

We are experiencing a time in our history that feels like the very soul of our country is being laid bare.

- In this time of crisis, let us join in the affirmation that Equality is a human right,... it is a matter of justice, and as such, it is non-negotiable.. every human being must make his-her own commitment to equality. Jesus clearly sought for the inclusion of all people, and Justice for all, praying for the Kingdom of God here on earth.
- Let us awake and rise to this historic moment. There are always risks, and challenges, for that very reason, we must be in faithful conversations as we seek to move from a culture of domination to mutuality, in order to achieve full social justice and respect for the human rights of all persons.
- On this world communion Sunday, we celebrate our connections and solidarity with Christian through out the world. I think specially in my home church, Emmanuel church in Cochabamba - Bolivia, were my family is worshiping and sharing communion. We all Christian faces the same challenges and issues in our churches and societies, in the mist of them we are call to be the body and blood of Christ in this world.
- We are called to build a beloved community for all, based on relationships of reciprocity and trust.
- We are called to awake, Awake Our souls oh God, awaken us to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ, to make human life more truly human, to claim the power God gives us to listen and to stand with those who suffer injustice and oppression, to partner with them on behalf of their liberation.

Let us root out the foundations of systems of domination in all their forms of control, submission and imposition and let us create systems of care, solidarity, responsibility, mutual respect and justice for all people.

May we claim God's word through the prophet Ezequiel

A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. So be it. Amen.

