

Jesus' response to the question about divorce reveals himself as the true interpreter of God's Word. He doesn't get rid of the Hebrew Torah. Nor does he say that the law is just fine as it is. What he does do is give depth to it. He opens up its deeper meaning.

From the First Book of Moses to the final book of Zechariah, families have turned against one another - Cain and Abel, Joseph and his brothers... it goes on and on. And so, families obviously cannot be counted on for social stability, any more than can the Pharisees, or the empire who would arrest Jesus and then persecute his followers.

I think it is significant that Jesus comments about children as well as divorce. Because the two topics are related. And the issue has to do with the obligations of society to its most vulnerable members. Here's the point of law: It is the structuring of human society necessary for life together. If our corporate actions go unregulated, the strong will thrive and the powerless will suffer. Divorce has to do primarily with providing a safe environment for women who, like young children, may need defenders in the world of the wealthy and strong. Why even Joseph, when Mary had been engaged to him, but before they lived together, was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit - and he didn't know that - he had already resolved to dismiss her quietly because he was unwilling to expose her to public disgrace. He knew how bad it would be out there for her, as a young pregnant woman. Matthew 1:18-19

Our Christian life is lived in the midst of a broken world and believers are by no means exempted from the forces that tear at the most basic relationships. And that many experience the world as hurtful is not surprising. Civil Rights Attorney Bryan Stephenson begins his monumental book, *Just Mercy*, with a quote from the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, "Love is the motive, but justice is the instrument". With God's love and Spirit and power in us & through us, we can live better.

In these times, we must live better!

The presence of God in the church doesn't make the law disappear,
but it makes it more embedded in our lives.

Now, it's a part of our hearts,

and not just something on the outside in some book that we're called to follow.

All this doesn't make God's Word & God's life easy to live.

We still have bad thoughts and bad intentions and bad behavior.

Ruth Graham was married to the old-time evangelist Billy Graham.

She was once asked in an interview if in her long marriage,
she ever considered divorcing him.

She said, "Well, I've never considered divorce,

but on several occasions, I have considered homicide." That's real!

A proper response, I believe,

is to ask how God deals with brokenness,

which is of course the main theme of Jesus' life and teachings.

"Those who are well have no need of a physician," Jesus told his pious critics,

"but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

And Jesus gives his life as a ransom.

Crucial here is that God, who created and sustains the world,

is committed to the well-being of the human family -

which means a particular attention to those who are most vulnerable.

Laws regarding divorce, like laws regarding children's rights,

remain necessary for the protection and well-being of families -

regardless of their makeup.

And the Jesus who makes such statements tells elsewhere

that even these most basic social units may fail;

and that there is a mercy, and a place for the broken.

Now that mercy doesn't obscure God's intention, that the world is to be a place

where trustworthy relationships are cultivated and encouraged and blessed.

The Eucharist that we celebrate today

is the power of God's Real Presence being brought into our lives again & again.

This Feast of Love is here to make us not just better adherents to God's Word,
but more loving people in this world as we strive for a just mercy for all!