

St. John's Episcopal Church

8 Sunnyside Avenue

Pleasantville, New York 10570

The Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 22 (B)

October 7, 2018

Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“Escape Clause”

The Holy Gospel according to

Mark 10:2-16

Some Pharisees came, and to test him they asked, “Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?” He answered them, “What did Moses command you?” They said, “Moses

allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal and to divorce her.” But Jesus said to them, “Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you. 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. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.” Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. He said to them, “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another commits adultery against her; and if

she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.” People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But 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. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.” And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.

Dear Lord, help us to love one another as you have loved us. Amen.

The head of a large real estate company had a small sign behind his chair that read, "I am the boss." One day one of his sales persons taped a note to the sign that read, "Your wife called. She wants her sign back!"

One Saturday evening as Mrs. Johnson was finishing the dishes, Mr. Johnson standing behind her asked, "Would you like to go out, girl?" Mrs. Johnson quickly replied, "Oh, yes, I would love to!" They had a lovely evening. It wasn't until later

that Mr. Johnson confessed that his question, “Would you like to go out, girl?” had been addressed to the family dog lying near Mrs. Johnson's feet on the kitchen floor.

It has been noted that when country western songs are played backwards you get your dog back, you get your truck back, you get your spouse or sweetheart back. Of course, what we really want to get back is our love. Some country music is noted for its transparency. One country song has the title, “My Wife Just Left with My Best Friend and I Miss Him.” Another lyric says, “Our Marriage Was a Failure, but Our

Divorce Ain't Workin' Either.” Then there is, “We Live in a Two-Story House. She's Got Her Story, and I've Got Mine.” And another favorite title goes, “I'm So Miserable without You, It's Almost Like You're Here.” There can be humor in even the grimmest situations.

H. King Oehmig says marriages are made in heaven, but so also are thunder, lightning, tornados, and hail. So due caution is in order for a successful marriage.

We have a “tendency to compartmentalize – to put God in a box – to

go to Sunday School and church on Sunday morning and go about our business the rest of the week. We're like the little four-year-old girl who, when the minister came to her home to visit, asked him, "Would you like to see Jesus?" He said, "Why, of course I would!" She ran to her closet, climbed up on a chair and got a little ceramic figure of Jesus down and brought it for him to see. "That's beautiful," he said, "Thank you for showing it to me." "You're welcome," she replied, "Now I've got to go and put Jesus back on the shelf where he belongs."

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/sermons/mar-k-102-16-straight-talk-about-stewardship-mclarty/>

You can't take it with you ... but we can't help wishing we could. Many have a fascination about getting to the Pearly Gates and needing a little cash.

The story is told of three men who went to the funeral home to pay their respects to a mutual friend. The first looked at the body and said, "I don't know if we'll need money in heaven or not, but I'd hate to think ole Charlie would wake up and be caught

short.” With that, he took a twenty-dollar bill out of his wallet and slipped it into Charlie’s coat pocket. The second man said, “That’s awfully nice of you, and, to tell you the truth, I owed Charlie some money.”

With that, he took out a twenty-dollar bill and slipped it into Charlie’s coat pocket.

The third man said, “Well, I don’t think we’re going to need money in heaven, and I certainly didn’t owe Charlie anything, but I feel like I ought to follow suit. So, he took out his checkbook and wrote a check for fifty dollars and slipped it into Charlie’s coat pocket, and then he took the two twenties in change.

<https://www.sermonwriter.com/sermons/mark-102-16-straight-talk-about-stewardship-mclarty/>

In 2006, Pastor Phil McLarty [see link above] wrote: “in 1973 I was serving as student pastor of a small church in Prosper, Texas, just north of Dallas. We had a Board of Trustees that looked after the property. They wanted to buy a vacant lot across the street from the church for parking and for future development. The price was \$8,000, which was a lot of money in those days, particularly for a small congregation. To raise the money, the chairman of the board

asked the others to join him in making a pledge. He hoped that would serve as a catalyst for the rest of the congregation to follow suit. We met in the basement of the church around folding tables. There were eight men and one woman. Her name was Mary James. She and her husband, Larry, had two young children. Larry worked in McKinney for Fisher Controls. Mary ran a small beauty shop next to their house. They were doing all right, but they didn't have a lot of discretionary income. So, it sort of put Mary in a bind to be asked to make a pledge right there in front of the others. But she was a faithful member of the church and

she was proud to be member of the Board of Trustees, and she wanted to do her part. The chairman passed out little slips of paper, and, like the others, Mary jotted down her pledge. Then one of the men went around the table and collected them in his hat and took them to the chairman, who tallied them up and read the results. Most were for a hundred dollars a year. When he got to Mary's pledge, it read, 'One haircut per week.' He paused for a moment with a puzzled look on his face, then he asked Mary, 'How much do you get for a haircut.' She said, '\$5.00'. He did the math and put down the amount of Mary's pledge. \$260.

More than two and half times the others.
Yet, not all at once. One haircut per week.
It was her pledge of support and a symbol of
her devotion to God.”

I don't know if stewardship is an issue here at St. John's, but I am supplying at another church next month which wants me to preach on stewardship. I have tried to duck the issue by asking the Wardens to do a homily; one rejected that idea immediately; the other is thinking about it. But my particular inspiration which should assure that I will never be asked to return is the following: we ask people to increase

their pledge every year; but my insight now about that is that why would one be motivated to give more than perhaps a 'cost of living' increase, indexed to inflation? So, my idea is that if we feel we are not getting proper value, then why give more? but then I thought, we only give more if we are getting more; that's common sense, isn't it? But then I thought, whose responsibility is it for 'getting more'? Is it only the rector's or vestry's responsibility to 'give us more'? Or do we ourselves participate in 'getting more'? I think I have a role to play in my 'getting more'; if I am praying more, perhaps due to circumstances out of my

control, or perhaps due to some good thought I got from a homily, then I have gotten more, and I am closer to God and more in tune with the Holy Spirit who dwells within me. If I am serving more, reading my Bible more, and perhaps giving more time to the church, then I am not only giving more, I am getting more; caching! And if I review my life during the past few months or year and I find my faith is increasing and my service is also increasing, then I am motivated to give more. So, we each have some responsibility for ‘getting more’ out of our church each week; and if that’s the case, then I should give more.

What do you think? Is it worth the price of a haircut, no longer \$5 each where most of us live today, or one latte per week, or one lottery ticket, or one whatever cost we may have that is not really necessary each week?

And, a thought about divorce, which is certainly a part of today's gospel. The last piece of scripture that was incorporated into the Bible is twelve verses which are oftentimes inserted in the gospel according to John, Chapter 8, about the woman caught in adultery; Jesus forgave her and instructed: "sin no more". So that as I can see it is the thread some who have been divorced may

find to be healing. I note that several times when people were healed, Jesus gave that same admonition, 'sin no more'.

Also, in today's Gospel is the sentence which the old King James Version of the Bible translated: Jesus said, "Suffer the little children and let them come unto me." A hand painted picture of that scene stayed for years on my previous church's old Sunday School room long after they had grown up and had moved to another state and had their own children, I am sure. I will affirm that I thought I had a lot of suffering when I was a child since I was a severe asthmatic from age 3 until my father began smoking his

cigars outside when I was 13. Then I suddenly was healed. But children do have sufferings that we adults may not always understand or can explain. But for me, I found complete healing right as I was going through adolescence. It was amazing, but then I had to learn what living a 'normal life' meant, for the first time in my life. Strange story, isn't it? But as I reflected on what happened to me, I was always healthy at church, since almost no one smoked while they were at church, so I never encountered any of the smoke which was causing my asthma attacks at home and whenever I visited my father's parents, my grandparents

who both smoked Lucky Strikes constantly. My Dad smoked Camels. Fortunately my Mom never smoked. So, I can affirm that children can and do suffer.

I want to tell you about a small five-year old in my congregation in Connecticut; he may be a bit small for his age, but he is the most outgoing child in our small Sunday School. I will call him Jimmy. Jimmy is always smiling, and he loves to volunteer anytime he is able--helping take up the offering is one of his favorite things. But one summer Sunday, the older acolytes were all away, and we turned to Jimmy and asked him if he would like to be the crucifer if we

could find a cross he could carry, and he quickly agreed. We found a small cross, and I instructed him briefly before the service what he was supposed to do, and he was amazing in how well and quickly he learned. But one part of the crucifer's duty at that church is to hold the Gospel as the priest reads it in the midst of the congregation. So Jimmy carried this somewhat cumbersome heavy gospel book in a shiny brass cover, and he turned and faced me as he had been instructed—remember he is only about five years old. But when he held it, it was around my knee level and a bit askew, but fortunately I had on glasses that allowed me

to read from knee level. His mom was sitting in a pew very near him, and when she saw that Jimmy was holding the Gospel askew, she quietly got up and came up behind and beside him. I was secretly dreading that she would take the Gospel book away from him and hold it up herself. But, no, what she did was to gently rebalance the Gospel book in his hands so it was horizontal, and then she sat back down. I am not so sure other parents would have been so gentle, or permissive, but she was. Jimmy proudly continued to hold the book, and at the Eucharist he stood beside me at the altar, even though he could not see

above the altar, nor could anyone see him, but he remained completely involved during the entire celebration. What his mother did was amazing, I thought—she empowered Jimmy, gave him courage, and refused any urge to embarrass him. Jimmy did not have to suffer more to do the work of Jesus.

Hopefully, we see how God also comes behind and beside us in our time of need, and we too experience the healing presence that only God can bring to us. Let us celebrate the wonders and blessings of the life of our Lord and begin to celebrate more fully the opportunities we have to serve Our Risen and Ascended Lord. Amen.

Description:

Jesus holds out his helping hand to the most vulnerable of our world.

Tags:

Child, children, mother, father, parents, grandparents, divorce, John, gospel, acolyte, crucifer, church, celebrate, blessings, Jesus, Lord, Christ, God, Eucharist, cross, suffer, asthma, cigarettes, cigars, empower, Holy, Spirit, offering, stewardship, pledge, cost, living, index, inflation, James, version, bible, adultery, haircut, latte, lottery

St. John's Episcopal Church

61 Broad Street

Elizabeth, New Jersey 07201

The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 22 (B)

October 7, 2012

Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

“Too little too early?”

The Holy Gospel according to

Mark 10:2-16

Forgive us our sins, Dear Lord, as we
forgive the sins of others. Amen.

It is a welcome relief for some of us preachers of today's readings that the new gospel lectionary has been broadened to include the commentary of Jesus' interaction with little children. For at least 33 years we have only had the lectionary portion about adultery. My suspicion is that perhaps the adultery portion has been so ineffective that the choice of having concerns for children is now the more common issue of our society. Many if not most children both in the US and elsewhere grow up with less than two parents, and some of course grow up with none, as was the case in the first century and

well before when the faithful were called particularly to care for orphans and widows. Today widows often can be employed and care for themselves, but the growing problem of orphans still has not been solved and indeed may never be ‘solved.’ Minor children have extreme difficulty caring for themselves or find it completely impossible to do so. And of course infants are completely helpless. So the biblical mandate is clear that we need to care for children, in general.

I have been more than once caught off guard by a comment of a parent who really never cared for their own children—now

adoption agencies run vigorous programs seeking parents for what some may call “unwanted children.”

This past week I heard a very powerful woman preacher speaking about this particular issue in her own life. She was born in the outback of Australia and her first name was simply the number two thousand five hundred and eight. Her birth certificate simply said, “Unwanted.” She spoke about the terrible abuse she had suffered at the hands of more than a dozen men as she was growing up. And her story is surely reproduced many fold throughout the world. Children are at the mercy of adults, and this

problem plagues societies without protective parents and sometimes even with protective parents.

Number two thousand five hundred and eight now has a name, Christine Caine, and now she heads up a global initiative called “A Twenty One” [A21], seeking to put an end human sex trafficking. This topic of sex trafficking may seem so far away and irrelevant to our lives, but when we began building Habitat homes on Catherine Street about four blocks away from our church, we found that a large house across the street from our first Habitat house was brothel with very young Latin American girls aged

twelve to fourteen there. The City of Elizabeth and Union County spent the greater part of a year to get them closed down and evicted, believe it or not. Can you imagine that young girls are readily sold throughout the world by their own parents? It is indeed a great human tragedy today. And yet there is a probably a far more common problem here in our local midst, that of drug addicted mothers having babies, babies that are addicts even before they leave the womb. It is a very common problem in neonatal wards to care for these babies, tens of thousands if not millions of babies born each year with addictions

already in place due to their mother's abuse of drugs in utero. These babies are frequently born very premature, probably trying to escape the toxic environment of their mother's womb.

Several years ago I visited in the Beth Israel Hospital neonatal ward in nearby Newark and saw maybe a dozen preemies there. Only a few years later I came to baptize a twenty-six-week preemie at St. Peter's Hospital in New Brunswick, and the entire hospital floor was a preemie ward mostly for babies that had been born to addicted mothers; I estimated I could see more than a hundred of these addicted

premature babies. The doctors and nurses have to diagnose the mother's addiction and actually give that mother's drug to the preemie just to keep the little one alive. It is heart-wrenching to know that and to see that. The drug epidemic in our cities and suburbs and now even in remote rural areas is staggering.

In the apartment building we live in in Manhattan we see almost every young child being cared for by a nannie. The nannies often are not native English speakers, and I am sorry to say one can readily see how many nannies really care very little about these children in their care. There is

actually no standard of care when one uses a nannie to care for one's young child, I have noted. So no wonder nowadays the children's hearts are not turned toward their own parents, nor are the parent's hearts turned toward their own offspring. I would not hesitate to say this is a Number One priority of society now, to find ways that a Mother can actually be a full time Mother to her own children until they reach the first grade. Upward financial mobility has become an idol in our time and place, overtaking parents' responsibility to personally care for their own children. There are of course many exceptions, single

parents caring for their children must have outside care for their young ones. But these exceptions have today nearly become the rule of most all new parents.

The lucrative careers today that some women can have strongly interferes with their parenting responsibilities. And when these children grow up, should those parents not be surprised at the results they have produced? This creates a profound tension in families, resulting in greater and greater levels of divorce than at any other time in the history of this country and in many other parts of the so-called cultured world.

Arguments over money are the Number One cause of divorce in America, sex and children trailing along at distant second and third. And the response has been just to ‘make more money’ any way a family can, putting a big burden on society for child care.

Our own Elizabeth school system now has free child care for all children two and half years and over. Their school time is not long, however, but the stay at home moms seek employment at every chance. There is surely a balance between socialization and parenting, but at this point we have erred on the side of ‘socialization.’ This is a mistake

that Communist China has done for decades, but now the Free West has succumbed as well, and children in the United States and Europe and elsewhere are brought into commune-like systems much like those in mainland China. About 55 percent of children nowadays say they do not want to pattern their families after those of their parents; more than half! that is a staggering statistic! No wonder the gap between generations is so huge!

I attended an enormous twenties something Christian event this last week, clearly being one of the very few with white hair! The thirteen thousand youth there

were united in one thing, cell phone social media, which has by far outstripped family interactions. I estimated that no more than about ten percent of the young people at this conference were ever without their phones constantly surfing and commenting and communicating with someone of their own age. The event even featured a cell phone ‘party’ by having each person there in the large arena download an “app” called DeaconDan. At an appropriate moment the operators of that app sent signals to everyone having that app that would control the kids’ phones, creating a joyous phone flashing event in Technicolor. It was

amazing to see ten thousand cell phones operating in sync! But when I reflected how easy it would be to control what a young person might be viewing, it was a bit chilling to realize how the anti-Christ might one day do just that, control everything we see and hear using our own personal telephonic devices. What was fun one day could become something very sinister the next. Electronic media are addictive to our young people, noted Christine Caine, the creator of the global initiative called A Twenty One, A21, whom I mentioned earlier. We can mistake the unreal virtual world of telephone electronics for the in

person caring we each should be doing in the real world. Real people need real caring--the young, the vulnerable, the sex trafficked, the orphans, and the widows.

Our job today as Christians is to see that the little part of the world we inhabit becomes a more loving and caring place, always helping those who need us. We are the people of God's pasture caring for the lambs and sheep of God's hand. Without us the world has no hope.

Amen.

See also:

http://www.mycentraljersey.com/article/20120522/NJNEWS/305220057/St-Peter-s-fetes-its-littlest-babies?nclick_check=1