

Proper 22B 2021

Mark 10:2-16

Some Pharisees came, and to test Jesus 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.

Last weekend I was in Chicago to bury my father. My three brothers and I had decided to have a just a simple graveside service, with only family present.

While I was with my brothers, I was keenly aware of what different worlds the four of us live in. We each chose different occupations, joined different Christian denominations, have different circles of friends, different outlooks on life, different gifts and talents, different blind spots and foibles. And yet, there is a strong bond between us that transcends *all* of those differences.

I had always thought that this bond was simply the love that we have for one another. But as we gathered at that gravesite and shared memories of Dad, it became clear that the bond between us brothers is *more* than the love we have for each other. Much of the strength of that bond comes from our having been raised by the same father; being dependent for our childhood *lives* on the same father; receiving from the same father his imparted values, his knowledge, his perspectives, his consciousness.

Of course, it was only natural that as we matured, we *questioned* some of Dad's teachings and developed our **own** values, perspectives, and beliefs. But deep within each of us four brothers there still abides a common source, a common origin, a common consciousness which derives from our common father and binds us together.

I think that when Jesus says in today's Gospel, "whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it," he is talking about a similar unifying dynamic between our **Heavenly** Father and we who are His children.

John Shea writes: "The clue about why the kingdom belongs to children is in the word 'receive' (v. 15). Children, by definition, know they are not the cause of their own being. They have not forgotten their source, and they do not delude themselves by fantasizing that they are completely independent. Instead, they are aware of being in relationship... with their origin, their beginning. This relationship is not 'over and done with,' an event in the past. [Little children] are permanently present to God [the Father], and God [the Father] is permanently present to them. There is no separation... [They] live in communion with their Source."¹

There is no separation between little children and their heavenly Father. They live in communion with their Source.

But as we age, we tend to **forget** that we are *not* the cause of our own being. We tend to forget our Source, and we delude ourselves by fantasizing that we are completely independent from God and from one another. We tend to think that **our** way of viewing things is *right*, and everyone who doesn't see things as we do is woefully ignorant or just plain wrong, and therefore, is **separate** from us. We already *have* all the answers, all that we need for life, so we stop receiving what God and other people try to share with us. We no longer live in communion with our Source.

Years ago, Daniel Iverson wrote a small hymn – a prayer, really – in which he pleads:

Spirit of the Living God fall afresh on me.
Melt me, *mold* me, fill me, use me...²

The Spirit of the Living God cannot mold us if we are hardened in our thoughts, our perspectives, our attitudes, our consciousness.

My friends, I am convinced that what Jesus wants for each of us is a child-like, *teachable* spirit, continually open to being shaped and reshaped, melted and molded, by the unpredictable but entirely *trustworthy* Holy Spirit which blows where it wills, moving in us and amongst us. I think that **that's** what Jesus is referring to when he says we must become like little children in order to receive the Kingdom of God.

In his book *In Awe*, John O'Leary notes that: "Professor George Land [once] conducted a creativity study in children, using a test he had devised for NASA to help them select the most innovative engineers and scientists. It was a relatively simple test: He put people in a room with an average, everyday paper clip and

asked them to come up with as many ways to use a paper clip as possible. Over time, [Professor] Land observed sixteen hundred different children ranging in age from three to five years old.³

“And he was astonished by the results. On average, **each** of these children imagined *two hundred* different uses for that simple [paper clip]...

“Which explains why a whopping 98 percent of those children who were tested scored at the ‘genius level’ for [creative, out-of-the-box thinking.]...

“Professor Land later did this [same] study on adults...

“**Two** percent of adults scored at the genius level for [creative, out-of-the-box thinking.] The typical adult came up with ten to fifteen ideas for how to use that paper clip [compared to the **200** ideas the average child had].”⁴ I wonder if the unpredictable-but-trustworthy *Holy Spirit* is somehow connected to, and enmeshed with, the *creative* spirit of a child?

“Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

In his Letter to the Philippians, St. Paul exhorts, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus...” (2:5) The word “let” should tell us that this “mind of Christ” is already present within and among us as our unseen Source and origin, just as my Dad is always present within and among my 3 brothers and me, binding us together as our unseen source and origin.

“**Let** the little children come to me,” Jesus says; “do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. And he took them up in his arms... and blessed them.”

John Shea notes that “Jesus embraces these children as [his siblings]. They share the consciousness of the same parent. In the center of his being, Jesus knows himself as the Beloved Son who is always receiving the Holy Spirit from the Father.”⁵

My friends, you and I are, inextricably, Jesus’ siblings; for we share the same Father. May we ever know ourselves to **be** Beloved Children of God, bound together by a common Source, open as little children to the Holy Spirit creatively, constantly flowing from our Heavenly Father, renewing us with divine Life.

AMEN

1 John Shea, *Eating with the Bridegroom*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005, p. 242

2 “Spirit of the Living God,” words and music by Daniel Iverson (1926), © 1935, renewal ©1963 Birdwing Music. *Reprinted / podcast / streamed with permission under ONE LICENSE #A-720388 All rights reserved.*

3 George Land and Beth Jarman, *Breaking Point and Beyond* (San Francisco: Harper Business, 1993).

4 O’Leary, John. *In Awe* (p. 220). Copyright © 2020 by John O’Leary Published in the United States by Currency, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York. Crown. Kindle Edition. pp. 17-18

5 Shea, *ibid.*