



Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

Elaine Patrick

Job 1:1; 2:1-10

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

Mark 10:2-16

Psalm 26

Lord, make us an instrument of your peace.

"Therefore, what God has joined together let no one separate"

I offer these words from our Gospel passage this morning to consider both our Creator's desire and our action.

I am thinking about God's grand and glorious creation; you me, animals of all kinds, the water we drink, the soil that hosts our food, and the air we breathe - human relations, creature dependency and the elements that support all life. Our creator has woven us together with such fine and delicate balance.

In God's abundant grace this union exists for our flourishing. Consider the cost of separation.

It is our day to celebrate together the feast of St. Francis of Assisi – the father and founder of the Franciscan order known to be nature loving and peacekeeping, dedicated to the poor, oppressed, and willing to bring about justice. Francis embodied belief by giving way to a life of minimalist existence. What we know most famously about this man Francis is his full dedication to a life of service and his love of all creation. I also sense a dedication to action. Francis lived with a desire for change and for a deep intimacy with both creation and creator.

And today we celebrate -mirroring that love by special attention and blessing of the creatures in our lives. We intuitively know as Francis did that, we as humans flourish when we call out to the rest of creation, when we are willing to live and love and journey with creatures of all kinds. The pets we so love Francis would say- are to be our beloved companions. Along with the elements of the world, Brother Sun, and Sister Moon all creation is interdependent and to flourish God calls us into relationship. I believe what Francis would have us see here is that union and harmony of all creates flourishing. This day reminds us just how vital all creatures are and how connected we are to all of creation.

As I think about the beauty, the love, and the complexity that is this divine creation and I wonder what kind of responsibilities we carry for flourishing.

It is important to wonder, do our actions unify or separate?

These same questions rose as I read and reread our Gospel for today. I invite us to approach this text with this same lens of guidance and action.

We are in the sixth week of a twelve-week run through Mark's Gospel and we have already heard some strong language from Jesus meant to grab our attention. Jesus cautioned we are destined to lose body

parts and sight and so on. And here we are again, faced with a judgement of divorce that is quite uncomfortable. This is undoubtedly an important topic in these times, and it is a way for the Pharisees to test Jesus, and Jesus lets the Pharisees answer their own question – laying to rest this test and we move to a larger message - what it means to be in true relationship – in union with one another. Our God is relational and desires intimacy for us and with us. In this time and in the moment of this exchange marriage is a symbol of union and divorce a symbol of separation...

We hear:

“So they are no longer two, but one flesh” - this stands for all relationship and the union God desires. We can see an image of union.

In the earliest printings of the Prayer Book, The Church of England vows of matrimony mirror this image:

“With this ring I thee wed, with my body I thee worship....”

These words bring forth an image of fully giving way to the intimacy that love requires; the intimacy God hopes *for* us and *with* us. And when we think of a world where we honor all of creation in this way, the word union comes alive.

Here we might hear these words a bit differently:

“therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

The interdependence God has created is not meant to be separated.

And yet we know that separation happens, and it can be very necessary. Many of us, my self included are divorced, and all of us have experienced separation, the breaking of relationship. This is part of human living. We carry the weight of separation as loss, any separation at all! We can see this in every aspect of our world and beyond.

As I replay Jesus’ words to his disciples, divorce becomes the symbol of separation and adultery the symbol of loss.

Hold that thought for just a moment.

Any separation no matter how necessary, produces loss. We will carry that loss and bare responsibility of that loss.

These last two weeks as our family navigates the aftermath of Hurricane Helene I am reminded of these very responsibilities. I lived many years in Florida before arriving here in Spokane. I’ve been standing by in support as phone calls back and forth ensure that family members still living there are safe, and we check on the work that lies ahead. We work as a family, now different and at the same time unified. All this loss reminds me of the loss from separation I still carry. I can only claim my responsibility to work toward reunification and reconciliation.

What ever the separation and loss you might be thinking of right now remember that it began in union as did all creation that surrounds us. Our creator, our God makes this possible.

God is in the creation; God is in the union and God holds us in the separation and loss.

We will have many moments of separation, for which we bare responsibility.

All the while God waits, God desires union for the flourishing of all creation. This is the justice to which Francis dedicated his life. We too are called to action that brings justice and to help heal the torn and broken places in ourselves, in our relationships, and in the world.

As we look around, what is the justice we might dedicate to and where might we see separation?

Where might we hold the responsibility of loss that requires mending?

On this day we celebrate Francis, who's life lifts the sacredness of our intimate union with our creator and holds a world of opportunity given to us in bounty that we may seek union with and for all.

May we too desire intimacy with our God and union for the flourishing for one another and of all creation.

May it be so. Amen.