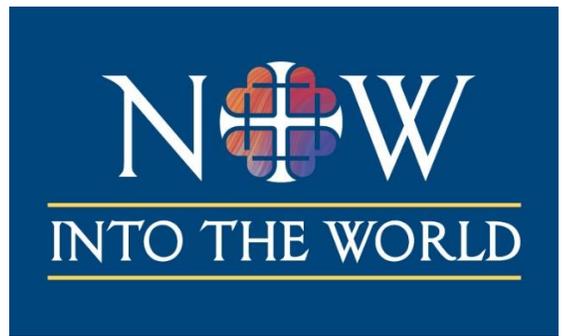


The language of Love

And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.



October 7th 2018

Proper 22 | Mark 10:2-16



Reflection by Julie Simonton –

One Saturday in May 2018, tens of millions of people the world over watched their television screens as Prince Harry married Meghan Markle; a British royal wedding, with all the tradition, pomp and ceremony that might be expected.

Perhaps less expected (by some at least) was the address given at the ceremony by our Presiding Bishop, the Most Rev'd Michael Curry. Bishop Curry's words called for "an end to all things ugly in the world, by replacing it with love". He continued, "We were made by a power of love. And our lives were meant and are meant to be lived in that love. That's why we are here."

In our Gospel reading for today, Jesus seems to be fielding lots of questions; powerful questions from Pharisees, surely trying to put Jesus to the test and hoping to catch him out, and later from his disciples, too.

The Pharisees' question concerns divorce, yes, but the context also extends to the law. On divorce, while Jesus' response rings unyieldingly harsh to our ears – it was resoundingly counter-cultural at the time. Here Jesus was addressing a culture that often understood wives as property. Men divorced women, but then society provided no formal safety nets or legal recourse for the discarded woman. So Jesus' intent in his response is the protection and honor of women.

On the question of law, Jesus actually elevates the women and children in this traditional, patriarchal system toward positions of equality. For Jesus, in the reign of God social and legal constructs are disrupted and expanded. Women are

given the same rights and responsibilities as men, and children serve as models for receiving God's Kingdom and love.

In other words, the context of relationships are extended and the most vulnerable are raised through God's love into powerful, complete equality.

So, too, our relationship toward stewardship has a much wider context than we sometimes imagine. Yes, it includes our time, skills ... and our money! ... but when did you last reflect on the powerful stewardship of elevating relationships; on the importance of Christians to take seriously not simply marriage (for those who are married), but all loving relationships, our family, our friendships, workplace relationships, and how our church relates to and loves the community it serves? And when did you last reflect on not only elevating relationships, but also elevating an actual person?

It was Virginia Wolff who said, "I have lost many friends – some by death, others by a simple inability to cross the street." Receiving "the kingdom of God like a little child" is a clue. Children see through our adult pretense to what is authentic – the emperor's new clothes do not impress them. And when a child throws arms round a mother's neck, gives a kiss and says, 'I love you', you can be sure that you have a glimpse of that kingdom and of an amazing God-given love.

That authentic and equalizing glimpse of kingdom love, however it comes, is the place that truly generous giving begin. It's the way God gives; it's the way we are to give, too.

"God can only give love - it's the only language He knows".

(Baron Rowan Williams of Oystermouth, formerly Archbishop of Canterbury, Church of England).



Reflection Questions

- The failure of any kind of relationship brings pain.
 - How might we come closer to God?
 - What things come between us and God that mean we might not feel loved or that we cannot fully love ourselves and others?
 - How does the way you give make a difference to the sharing of God's love through the work of your church? Give thanks for how God can use your love and your gifts and pray about where God is calling you next.

Julie Simonton is diocesan director of congregational development and stewardship.

She especially delights in church parking lot conversations when the Holy Spirit begins to bubble and folks authentically engage with where Jesus is calling us to use the gifts God gives us to do the work God call us to do.

