

God Goes on Dreaming
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My Old Testament professor at seminary said not to shy away from the difficult texts, the passages in scripture that you'd rather not deal with, the words that perhaps are easier to abandon than others. And this is one of those Sundays where it's easier for the preacher to talk about the psalm or the epistle, but if I did that, we'd all be left wondering **what** is going on in the gospel.

Today's lectionary manages to pair two texts that have been used for centuries as moral codes, as justifications for laws that undermine the worth and dignity of some people, especially women. This passage in Genesis has been used to say that because Eve was made from the rib of Adam as his companion that women are subordinate to men—that man was made first because he is the greater one. And Mark's text has been used to say that divorce is impermissible under any circumstance, even in the case of abuse and dysfunction.

And this context is what makes me ask where the gospel is in this text. How can we talk about this as the good news when it really doesn't feel like good news?

To answer this question, I think we need to go back to the beginning, "when God began to create the heavens and the earth". To answer this question, you need to remember that Genesis is not a monolithic account of creation. Scholars have identified Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 as being written by two different people with two very different perspectives. In Genesis 1, we find the repetition that *God saw that it was good*. In Genesis 1 we have the creation of humanity "in the divine image God created them, male and female God created them". This writer sees God as all-powerful, able to speak life into being, to make order out of chaos. Meanwhile, in Genesis 2 we have God creating

Adam out of the dust of the earth, and today's lectionary reading where Eve is created out of Adam's rib. The writer of Genesis 2 is the writer who brings us the image of God walking in the garden, a God who has human characteristics, and is in relationship with humanity.

Knowing this about the Genesis narratives is important, because in today's gospel, Jesus quotes both accounts instead of just one, rewriting the narrative a little bit more. The Pharisees ask him about divorce, and instead of answering immediately, Jesus says, well, what do the laws of Moses say? They answer correctly—a man can dismiss his wife with little more than a certificate. What they don't say, but what is implied is that the man, as the property owner would likely dismiss her with nothing more than the clothes on her back, leaving her to beg on the streets or become a prostitute. There were very few options for women not under the protection of a man for much of the world's history.

I picture Jesus getting frustrated with this idea, with this answer—it's not quite enough. Yes, Moses allowed you to do this because of your hard, unloving hearts that see a woman as nothing more than an object. But that, Jesus says, is not the dream of God. This is not the whole picture. The dream of God is that God created us male and female, in the divine image. Jesus quotes Genesis 1 here—he doesn't say that "eve was made from adam's rib, sooooo maybe you should be a bit kinder to her..." NO Jesus reinterprets the creation account in this moment and says that *we're not talking about hierarchy or who is first in the kingdom*. We are talking about the fact that women and men are created by God in God's divine image. And the dream of God is that we will not be separated by our inability to value the image of God in other people.

The dream of God is that we would see other people as God sees us—not with labels or other markers of identity floating above our heads

like we're in some video game where points are counted. Jesus takes Genesis chapter two and turns it around and says that it's not really about the rib or the dust or the naming but it *is about two people, created in the image of God to be in community, in relationship with one another. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh."*

What does this mean? What does this mean for us in a world where even the very dream of God for us be united in relationship with one another feels broken? Most of us have had to deal with the heartbreak and exhaustion of divorce, directly, or even indirectly. It is unavoidable—sometimes things just don't work out, sometimes two people cannot be in relationship with one another, sometimes we harm each other—this is a part of the human condition.

Where is the hope? Where is God's dream in this?

I think it's that we tend to read this passage as law, as a text that has to be followed to the letter. And yes, we can read it that way, but what if this moment is about Jesus simply raising our standards? I think Jesus recognizes that we cannot follow this law to the letter, but what if Jesus asks about Moses' law not to affirm it but to remind us that this was not the original plan? That brokenness and pain was not God's dream, and if the Pharisees thought they were being clever by saying that a cruel, inhumane divorce that left one person destitute was God's dream, then they were wrong.

The dream of God is that we are in a community no one can tear apart. The dream of God reminds us that sometimes our legalistic standards are too low, that there can be more. Jesus says *let the little children come to me, do not stop them, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs*. When we are children, we dream and hope in a way unfettered by the laws of the land or even of gravity. When we

are children, our community is bigger, our relationships less fettered by labels and hierarchy. *For it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs*, to those who can dream of a more perfect, hopeful future— together.

We live in a world where the dream of God is not fully realized. We still cannot see the image of God in every person, whether they're at our borders, or at our door, or testifying to our lawmakers. We cannot quite dream the dream of God all the time, or most of the time, because we're quick to judge one another, we're quick to fall into the brokenness and divisiveness of our world.

But, Br. James Koester, a friend and mentor of mine writes that “in spite of everything, God goes on dreaming. And we come here, [to church, to *this* community] to remind ourselves that God's dream is real.”

In spite of all of this, in spite of all of us. Because of all of us, created in the image of God, *God goes on dreaming*. And so should we—at church, in our work, in our homes—we should dream the dream of God, the dream of community—*for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs*.