

**TEXT: Mark 10:2-16**

**TOPIC: Pharisees ask Jesus if it is legal to divorce when law is to protect vulnerable; conversation shifts to child.**

**SUBJECT: The why in the way is a stumbling block that can be used as a building block.**

**TITLE: The “Why” in the Way**

Last weekend I observed the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of a car accident that should have killed me when I was a freshman at Chadron State College in Nebraska. While the accident mostly banged me up physically, I let it do a number on me emotionally.

After the accident, I began to confuse deprivation with humility. It took me several years until I started to understand why, and that was when I was an upper classman at the University of Denver.

The entire time between my freshman, and junior and senior years, there was a “why” in the way of the healing that was waiting to be received. When people are honest with themselves and their closest communities – families and churches – I think it’s important to recognize the why that can get in their way.

The why in the way of healing must be a human attribute because it seems that not only did the disciples and the Pharisees of Jesus’ time stumble over the whys in their respective ways, sadly – I think – people today do, too.

In today’s gospel reading, some Pharisees come to Jesus to test him with one of their “is it lawful” questions. The question isn’t a casual conversation piece about love, marriage or divorce. Jesus is being tested. The why that was in the way for the Pharisees, however, had everything to do with the legalism they imposed on passages like Deuteronomy 24:1-5, where Moses makes the merciful provision for a woman to be given a certificate of divorce, and if she marries someone else and then divorces her second spouse, she cannot remarry her first. Is it

lawful for divorce to happen? Yes, but not in the same way as “loving God and loving your neighbor as yourself.”

You see, the entire purpose of the “law” is to protect the vulnerable, and when a woman was given a certificate of divorce in the first century, she was extremely vulnerable, and if they had children together, the children were also extremely vulnerable. The law was intended to protect the vulnerable and the hurting, and whenever it would be used for a different purpose, it was twisting the Creator’s plan. Whenever the letter of the law is twisted, there is nothing spiritual attached to it.

Like the Pharisees, the disciples struggled in their understanding of Jesus’ teachings. As we saw last week, the disciples believed they were part of a closed “us” that no one else could join. That’s not unlike some churches today, who accept (and in some cases tolerate) insiders but struggle to welcome outsiders. Since church gatherings have always been intended to be gatherings of the broken and loved, the hurting and healing, and the lost but found, it’s tough to understand why some churches limit themselves to being OK with insiders but reject outsiders. In order for that to change, however, the church must address the why that’s in the way.

I know. I’ve seen that more times than I can count. In two of the churches I’ve served, there were stories deep in their pasts that had swept under the carpet 35-to-60 years prior. The secrets of those congregations, however, continued to fester and was evident in the anxiety in each congregation. Each of those congregations were stuck by the why in their way. When churches are stuck by the why in their way, they often become communities only for the strong, the wealthy, the powerful, and the independent rather than welcoming places and

healing centers for those who feel broken or lost. When churches embrace how God loves the vulnerable and the weak just as much – if not more – than the strong, wealthy, powerful, and independent, it makes perfect sense why churches become welcoming and centering places where weakness and vulnerability are strengths.

So, what's the why in your way? What's the why in our church's way?

Is the why in your way that you're afraid to get to know people you wouldn't normally associate with outside church? Is the why in your way the misguided belief that people will just come to church instead of the church going to where the people are?

Is the why in your way deeply rooted in your past awaiting forgiveness and grace?

Is the why in your way a generational grudge you have no idea how, when, why, or where it originated?

Some of the same questions might apply to the church.

Is the why in your way something the church tried and found it didn't work, so it was just given up on? Perhaps the time has come for it.

Is the why in the way of the church something hiding in history's shadows? Perhaps its time to discuss it and heal from it.

Is the why in the way the discomfort you feel when the church draws people in who are recovering addicts, mentally ill, or generationally poor?

Is the why in the way of the church some discomfort you have with persons of color, people whose first language is not English, or folks who bring in nontraditional ideas?

Those are just a few of the important questions to ask. Once asked, there is yet another why in the way. There's a difference with the second why, though. The second why in the way

is there to inspire you. The second why in the way is there to inspire the changes you need to make personally and to inspire the changes that need to occur in the church.

When I went to see that counselor when I was a junior, the why in my way was my birth order. The why in my way was the uncertainty I felt about my life. The why in my way ultimately pointed me in another direction than the direction I took in college.

The why in my way blessed me with the opportunity to dream dreams and see visions. The why in my way helped me realize I am loved by God and that God's grace has me covered. The why in my way has helped me realize I am a child – like you – and there are times Jesus puts me front and center: So, I may teach about the Messiah, so I may follow the Christ, and so maybe – just maybe – I can be blessed enough to be a blessing to others, inspiring people like you and me to move beyond “whys” waiting answers.

If I learned anything about the why in my way when I was in counseling, I had to learn it's OK to be insecure. Everyone is insecure; it's part of our humanhood. And because we are insecure and often impatient, impatience results in brokenness, and brokenness is nothing to be ashamed of. The why in our way gives us a reason, then, to look to the Light who is ready to guide us to answer whatever whys are in the way.

What the answer will be to the why in your way ultimately suggests whether you're willing to trust God all the time, because when people pour their hearts out before God and live as refugees in the kin-dom God provided for us, we start living; truly living.

In the name of the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God in perfect community. Amen.