

MARK 10:2-16
IN AN IDEAL WORLD...

In an ideal world... What would it be like? In an ideal world, all of our relationships would be full of love all of the time; we would get along fantastically well with everyone and there would be no falling out. In an ideal world, there would be no war, nations would co-operate and live together in peace and harmony. In an ideal world, every person would have enough food to eat, would live without fear and in safety, would be fit and healthy, and would be treated with respect. In ideal world, we would love God with all our heart and we would walk in the Lord's ways perfectly and for all our days. In an ideal world, we would be happy all of the time, content with what we have and who we are; we would make no mistakes and get everything right all of the time.

But we don't live in an ideal world. In our world, relationships can be abusive, bullying and filled with hatred; there is poverty in our world, reinforced by the fact that some are wealthy and powerful, while others are poor and vulnerable; nations go to war against each other and many people die, are wounded, or are made refugees by war. In our world, we all make mistakes, we all get things wrong, we are all weak at times, or tired, weary, and under pressure. Our relationship with God is spoiled by our faults and our rebellion, there are times when we ignore God, others want to push Him to margins and decide that He is irrelevant.

In an ideal world, every person who met Jesus would have embraced Him with open arms and welcomed Him, would have recognised His qualities and loved Him heart and soul. But they didn't and our reading from Mark today is based on a trick question, the Pharisees hoping that Jesus will say something that they can use against Him in the future. "*Is it lawful...*" (Mark 10:2) Jesus takes them back beyond law to way things were at the beginning and what lies at basis of marriage. "This is the ideal" He says; this is what He commends as being best for people: a man and a woman come to love each other and commit to live together in love all the days of their life. But we don't live in an ideal world: "*It was...*" (Mark 10:5) In Jewish culture, men were able to discard their wives for the least thing; but the law said that a man needed to give his wife a certificate of divorce, as some kind of protection against her exploitation. This is nothing like the legal process that we have today and should not really be compared because this was all about men exercising what they saw as their right and simply throwing their wives out. The law gave her some protection, but not much. Jesus takes them back to God's ideal for marriage and human relationships.

What does our faith have to say to this less-than-ideal world? Is Christian faith about trying to create an ideal world where everything is perfect? Is that what Jesus came to do? Hebrews 2 shows us something different; Hebrews shows us God coming to live in our world as it is, to save and redeem the world. The preacher in Hebrews paints a picture of Jesus coming into our world, the world we live in; He shows us Jesus being one of us, being one with us in our humanity; he shows us Jesus, the perfect man living well, and dying on the cross to save us. "*In bringing...*" (Hebrews 2:10) The preacher can't resist reminding us of who God is and how great God is, but the same God worked out our salvation through the suffering and death of His Son; Jesus became our Saviour by His suffering, death and then resurrection.

God knows our world from the inside out; that's what Jesus gives His Father in heaven, what our world is like from the inside. Every step of the way, God has loved our less than perfect world and His grace has gone to work to bless the world. The Law looks after people who are poor, vulnerable, and who are strangers – hence the "certificate of divorce"; God speaks about forgiving people their sins, patiently, faithfully loving His people; Jesus took little children in His arms, the least, lowest and last in society and blessed them and told the world that they and people like them belonged in God's kingdom; Jesus came to seek and save the lost and to do that He gave His life on the cross. This is how God has always been with our less-than-

ideal world, understanding, patient, forgiving, as well as holy and challenging people to live better lives, full of faith, hope and love.

This is how God is with us in our world: full of grace, patience, forgiveness, understanding, compassion. In an ideal world, there would be no need for the gospel and for this communion service, because the world would not need a Saviour. But we are not ideal people and so the world is not an ideal world. GK Chesterton, the author, was asked “what is wrong with the world?” He answered, “I am!” So, we need grace; we need a Saviour and God has given us Jesus; He has come and He has suffered and died and raised, and it is fitting. We have this communion service to remind us of Jesus, but it is not the commemoration of a dead hero; this is a connection with the living Lord who loves us and who pours out His love into our hearts. Here is grace for people who are weak and weary, for lives that are broken, for relationships under strain, for people who have fallen out with each other and have fallen out of love with God, for people who themselves are suffering and in pain – in other words, for us. We come to Jesus, to find grace for our less-than-ideal lives; grace is here in abundance!