

Sunday 27 B

In the Gospels you will find very little record of Jesus' words about marriage. In fact I think this is the only one. His silence is surely deliberate. He does say plenty about love.

The Pharisees are presenting this question of Divorce to trick Jesus. Somehow he is going to be in trouble whichever way he judges: legal or not.

So Jesus goes back to Genesis and the second story of God creating the world. In this passage the bible sets out a truth about the unalterable nature of the human God has created. Man and woman are created with the purpose of coming together in love, companionship and fidelity. Nothing can change that purpose inherent in our human make-up.

He says nothing about how it is to work out in the details of a marriage. Nothing.

To find his mind we need to go to two episodes: Again I think the only cases where Jesus, by his action, shows his mind.

The First is his presence at the marriage feast of Cana. The miracle expresses God's regular action by taking the healthy good water of the human love of the spouses and transforming it into something much richer – by the grace he gives in the sacrament. Jesus' presence shows approval. He solves an embarrassing problem. But he warns that it is not his purpose to solve all the problems that will arise.

"My time has not yet come" the danger: they will misunderstand and see me a convenient magician.

The second is Jesus with the Samaritan woman at the well. She is hostile to Jesus. Gently he persists: I want to give you living water. Once her interest is aroused Jesus changes tack abruptly: Go and fetch your husband. There is no logic. It does not fit the conversation so far nor is it relevant to what Jesus is offering her. But he makes the point that she has had 5 husbands – 5 failures and the present colleague is no good to her.

She is therefore not respectable. She is not abiding by natural or Jewish law.

In all this I see the practice of Pope Francis. Do not engage in theories and arguments about what is right or wrong. Dogma has no concrete existence nor has Canon Law. This was the concern of the Pharisees. Sadly it is the version of Catholic doctrine and Life that looms large for many priests, and people. Instead Francis sees Jesus dealing with real people, and the joys and sorrows with which they struggle. The woman at the well is one of these. Is there love there? Not much evidence in the brief encounter. But Jesus saw a readiness in her heart.

In marriage there are boundaries. Male and Female he created them. A man and woman must leave behind their childhood and bond in a permanent union.

Where is the dogma or rule of law that can help when it does not work out?

Do not look for such in the Gospel. Where there is any love, God is there says Francis. Jesus found it in this unlikely candidate. For she is the one who becomes the apostle to bring her whole village to Jesus, while the 12 are bothering about what to have for dinner. "We know he is the saviour of the world"

The modern world may start to listen to us if we follow this example. Perhaps our children will find some reason to hold on to the church if they see us not tied up in theory, but active in practice. The essential is that we go to those where it has not worked out, bringing hope and love.