

Job 1:1; 2:1-10

1There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, one who feared God, and turned away from evil. 1Again there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came among them to present himself before the LORD. 2And the LORD said to Satan, "Whence have you come?" Satan answered the LORD, "From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." 3And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil? He still holds fast his integrity, although you moved me against him, to destroy him without cause." 4Then Satan answered the LORD, "Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. 5But put forth thy hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face." 6And the LORD said to Satan, "Behold, he is in your power; only spare his life." 7So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD, and afflicted Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8And he took a potsherd with which to scrape himself, and sat among the ashes. 9Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God, and die." 10But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

Psalm 26 or Psalm 25 (UMH 756)

Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12

1In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; 2but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs. 5For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. 6It has been testified somewhere, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou carest for him? 7Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honor 8putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. 9But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one. 10For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, 12saying, "I will proclaim thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee."

Mark 10:2-16

2And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his

wife?" 3He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" 4They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce, and to put her away." 5But Jesus said to them, "For your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. 6But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 7'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, 8and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. 9What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." 10And in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter. 11And he said to them, "Whoever divorces his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; 12and if she divorces her husband and marries another, she commits adultery." 13And they were bringing children to him, that he might touch them; and the disciples rebuked them. 14But when Jesus saw it he was indignant, and said to them, "Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. 15Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it." 16And he took them in his arms and blessed them, laying his hands upon them.

Revised Standard Version of the Bible

True Companion

Last month, several papers and Internet news sites reported on a survey of religion that sociologists from Baylor University's Institute for Studies of Religion, in Waco, Texas developed, and Gallup pollsters conducted. The survey asked 77 questions with nearly 400 answer choices that burrowed deeply into beliefs, practices and religious ties. In compiling the survey, the Baylor researchers formulated four descriptions of God, and then asked survey respondents which most closely matched their idea of who God is. Those descriptions were:

- * **Authoritarian God:** Angry at earthly sin and willing to inflict divine retribution.
- * **Distant God:** A faceless, cosmic force that launched the world but leaves it alone.
- * **Benevolent God:** Sets absolute standards for man, but is also forgiving--engaged but not so angry.
- * **Critical God:** The classic bearded old man, judgmental but not going to intervene or punish.

A columnist for the Wall Street Journal, James Taranto, decided to ask readers to come up with their own versions to supplement the four in the survey. Here are some of the ones the readers came up with:

- * **Noncommittal God:** Loves his children, but isn't "in love" with them.
- * **Passive-aggressive God:** "Go ahead, sin if you want to. Don't worry about my wrath."
- * **Obsessive-compulsive God:** Washes his hands of us hundreds of times a day.
- * **Co-dependent God:** Enables us to sin so that we'll need him.
- * **Jewish mother God:** "My children--I gave them life, but do they pray?"
- * **Customer service God:** "Press 1 for the Father, 2 for the Son, 3 for the Holy Spirit."
- * **Progressive God:** Has outgrown the simplistic belief in his own literal existence, considers himself spiritual but not religious.
- * **Planned Parenthood God:** One Son is enough.
- * **Rush Limbaugh God:** "Talent on loan from me."

- * **Hippie God:** Must have been on something when he created the world.
 - * **CIA God:** Knows everything, but lacks the resources to process and analyze it.
 - * **Sports God:** Similar to **Distant God**, but occasionally intervenes when a big play is needed.
 - * **Hertz Rent-a-God:** He puts you in the driver's seat.
 - * **Avis Rent-a-God:** He tries harder.
 - * **Enterprise Rent-a-God:** He'll pick you up.
 - * **Visa God:** He's everywhere you want him to be.
 - * **Master God:** Priceless.
 - * **American Express God:** Don't leave home without him.
 - * **Budweiser God:** This God's for you.
 - * **Windows God:** Plug and pray.
 - * **Google God:** For those who are always searching.
 - * **Frugal God:** Jesus saves.
 - * **Soccer God:** How about a pray date with his Son?
- And my personal favorite:
- * **Hippocratic God:** So powerful, he thinks he's a doctor.

I put a link to the study on our church web site. By the way, “Benevolent God” is the version that most American Protestants prefer.

In our Scripture reading from Mark this morning, Jesus is confronted by Pharisees who ask him about divorce. The Pharisees were, by this time, looking for any occasion to catch Jesus in his words. John the Baptist had recently been beheaded for challenging the Herods on divorce. Herodias had divorced her husband Philip and remarried his brother Herod Antipas. Would Jesus contradict his own previous words about divorce, or worse, those of Moses? That is what the Pharisees were hoping for.

Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife? That is what the Pharisees wanted to know. There were two schools of thought on the subject at that time. The liberal school of Hillel allowed divorce for almost any reason, while the conservative school of Shammai allowed divorce only if adultery was involved. Notice that the question that was raised by the Pharisees was based on the underlying Jewish assumption that men divorced women, not the other way around. The Greeks and Romans that surrounded them also allowed women to divorce men. Score one for the Greeks and Romans.

Jesus wisely asked the Pharisees what Moses had said on the subject - with a passage from the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy. *"Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds something objectionable about her, and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house; she then leaves his house and goes off to become another man's wife. Then suppose the second man dislikes her, writes her a bill of divorce, puts it in her hand, and sends her out of his house (or the second man who married her dies); her first husband, who sent her away, is not permitted to take her again to be his wife after she has been defiled; for that would be abhorrent to the Lord, and you*

shall not bring guilt on the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a possession"
(Deuteronomy 24:1-4).

Note that this passage from Deuteronomy does **not** grant a man permission to divorce his wife, but simply describes - without condemnation - a situation where the man has already done so. The passage is not about granting the husband permission to divorce but rather on prohibiting him from remarrying an ex-wife who has married another man. The certificate of divorce provides the divorced wife with legal protection and the right to remarry. Note also that this passage from Deuteronomy does not condemn the divorced wife's second marriage.

When the Pharisees quote this passage from Deuteronomy, Jesus answers them, saying "*Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you*". Jesus tells them that God has permitted divorce because of the hardness of heart that people, specifically the men in Jewish society, have. So Jesus is saying that divorce is something that God has allowed because people are hard of heart - are sinners. Think about it for a minute. If there was no sin, would there be divorce?

I'd be willing to bet that every one here today either is or was divorced, has parents who were divorced, has a brother or sister or a son or a daughter, who was divorced. So everyone of us knows something about divorce from first hand knowledge. I would also be willing to bet that in every case some sort of sin was involved on the part of one or maybe both of the partners in the marriage. It might have been alcoholism or drug abuse. Maybe an affair. Maybe physical or mental abuse. Maybe neglect. There must be a million reasons why people get divorced. But what if there wasn't? Would two people that loved each other enough to get married divorce for no reason at all?

There is a song I like by Sheryl Crow called "Strong Enough" that puts into words the difficulty that people have in preserving a relationship. The words ring true in so many cases.

*God, I feel like hell tonight
Tears of rage I cannot fight
I'd be the last to help you understand
Are you strong enough to be my man?*

*Nothing's true and nothing's right
So let me be alone tonight
Cause you can't change the way I am
Are you strong enough to be my man?*

*Lie to me
I promise I'll believe
Lie to me
But please don't leave*

*I have a face I cannot show
I make the rules up as I go
It's try and love me if you can
Are you strong enough to be my man?*

*When I've shown you that I just don't care
When I'm throwing punches in the air
When I'm broken down and I can't stand
Will you be strong enough to be my man?*

*Lie to me
I promise I'll believe
Lie to me
But please - don't leave*

When it comes right down to it, divorce is just another manifestation of the human condition. It is a manifestation of our inability to live a perfect life. The Apostle Paul tells us how hard it was to do what was right, even when he knew full well what was right. Can we do better than Paul did? I doubt it. I don't think that I can. Fortunately, we have Jesus who came into our world to forgive us when we don't do what is right. *"For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; for God all things are possible"*, is Jesus's reply to our human condition.

After Jesus tells the Pharisees about their hardness of heart, he continues on a more positive note. He points them to the passage from Genesis where it says: *"But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate"*

Jesus is pointing towards an ideal - an ideal that God has created for us.

By the way, in the passage *"Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate"*, the Greek word for "joined together" is used to describe two animals united by a 'yoke', like a pair of oxen pulling a plow. That connotation has its positive aspects; two people pulling towards a common goal with a common purpose. But it also has negative aspects. Like, well . . . like a pair of oxen pulling a plow.

Jesus tells us that God has created us to be together. In today's society, sometimes marriage is downplayed. After all, a married couple with children is not as common as it once was. Today, we have all sorts of other choices. Many people stay single and never marry, either by choice or by circumstance. Single parent families are common, as are the divorced or widowed. Those choices and circumstances work for a large proportion of the population, and it isn't right or fair to look down on or condemn people that aren't part of a couple. After all, Jesus didn't condemn

people that were divorced, and he certainly looked after the widow and the orphan. We would be wise to do the same.

But . . . when all is said and done, deep down inside most people is a yearning for that ideal relationship. The authors of romance novels know this full well, and many of them make a good living catering to that yearning. So too do the directors and actors of what I like to refer to as “chick flicks”. And of course, songwriters have been writing songs about true love for as long as there have been songs. Marc Cohn, in his song “True Companion”, captures this yearning for an ideal relationship, I think as well as anyone has.

*Baby I've been searching like everybody else
Can't say nothing different about myself
Sometimes I'm an angel
And sometimes I'm cruel
And when it comes to love
I'm just another fool
Yes, I'll climb a mountain
I'm gonna swim the sea
There ain't no act of God girl
Could keep you safe from me
My arms are reaching out
Out across this canyon
I'm asking you to be my true companion*

*So don't you dare and try to walk away
I've got my heart set on our wedding day
I've got this vision of a girl in white
Made my decision that it's you all right
And when I take your hand
I'll watch my heart set sail
I'll take my trembling fingers
And I'll lift up your veil
Then I'll take you home
And with wild abandon
Make love to you just like a true companion
You are my true companion
I got a true companion*

*When the years have done irreparable harm
I can see us walking slowly arm in arm
Just like the couple on the corner do
'Cause girl I will always be in love with you
And when I look in your eyes*

*I'll still see that spark
Until the shadows fall
Until the room grows dark
Then when I leave this Earth
I'll be with the angels standin'
I'll be out there waiting for my true companion
Just for my true companion*