

Matthew 12:47-50 10/20/13 (Red Letters #6) **LETTERS OF RELATIONSHIP**

So, as with all of these **Red Letter** categories, if you were going to do this properly, these Letters of Relationship would need to be a whole sermon series in itself. If you get a **Red Letter** book and go through all of the readings in this category, you'll see that Jesus covers all kinds of stuff here: Fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, marriage, divorce, celibacy, friendship. He talks about arguments and court cases, revenge, enemies, neighbors, promises and greed. There is simply way too much to cover in one message.

And again, as with the other Red Letter categories, Jesus offers up to you a radically different world view than what we're used to seeing...starting with the first reading. You know people tend to have an image of Jesus where somehow He's softer on us than God the Father. He lets us get away with more stuff. Like... **"Jesus is all about love, so He's not going to hold us accountable for our little flaws and failings."** Really?! It makes you wonder if they ever actually read the Sermon on the Mount. He says there, you think you're keeping the 5th commandment because you haven't killed anybody? What you owe your brother runs far deeper than that. You think you've kept the Sixth Commandment by not doing the act? You've already blown it with your eyes and your heart. You think you can just create no-fault divorce? He says there is no **no-fault** divorce. He says, you think you're doing well to go one mile for your neighbor, go the extra mile. You think it's o.k. to love those who love you and hate those who hate you? I say, love those who hate you. And finally, just in case there is anyone in that audience, or this audience who somehow thinks they made it through that gauntlet untouched, he says:

Slide: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48 NIV)

Well folks, any human being who has an ounce of honesty in him, will know that there's no way. We can't be perfect and we certainly can't be perfect in all those aspects of relationships that Jesus is talking about in the Commandments under our obligations to our neighbor, the second table of the Law. Jesus was literally driving us to desperation so that we would be driven to Him, to the One Who can drape His perfect life over our imperfection.

In the second reading today Jesus zeros in on marriage. The church leaders had basically gotten to the point where they had made it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason, like if she burned the roast. And even though they didn't want to change that, they instinctively knew it wasn't right, so they brought the question to Jesus to see what he'd do with it. And they got way more than they bargained for, and so did our culture today. They got the origin and the definition of marriage.

Slide: 4 "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' 5 and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate.'" (Matthew 19:4-6 NIV)

So: Male and female, Two, not three or more, for life. And we see that marriage is not just a social contract, something man creates and defines, it was created and ordained by God. And of course today, one of the most challenging issues of our day is gay marriage. Our president has evolved in his understanding and so has political correctness to say that **of course** we should allow gay marriage in our culture. Love is love. People see it as an issue of fairness. And our culture is rapidly transforming to the point where any disagreement with that position simply isn't going to be tolerated.

Slide: AIG hate speech toon

And so we've got groups of people who say they are all about tolerance and coexisting and not judging – until you simply say what Jesus said about marriage, and then their tolerance rapidly disappears. Folks, again, my heart goes out to those who have been confused about this issue, who have no Biblical world view, no framework to understand why God wants marriage to be only for men and women. And we don't have time here to say everything that could be said about this. One thing you should know is that Jesus was in the middle of the Roman Empire, which had a very large gay community, a much higher percentage of the population than we do today. So it wasn't that Jesus didn't know about those kinds of relationships when He defined marriage. Neither does He spend time ranting and raving and labeling. He just speaks the truth about how He created us and the way He wants us to live. And in a loving and compassionate way, we need to do the same. It doesn't matter that we're not in step with society on that. As long as we're in step with Jesus.

I would add however, that being in step with Jesus means that we are in step with His mission and that is to bring all people to Himself. You know, when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them how to pray, Jesus said to them, **“This then, is how you should pray: **“Our Father...”**** God is everybody's Father. And He wants everybody to know that and to come and be part of His family. He doesn't want His prodigal sons and daughters to stay in the pig pen and He doesn't want their older brothers to say “good riddance.” He wants us not to fear and be phobic of others, but to love and invite others. In His “High Priestly prayer”, Jesus said:

Slide: 20 “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.” (John 17:20–23 NIV)

Folks, if you stay with us through all of the Red Letters, one of the things that absolutely stands out is the community that Jesus has with the Father and the Holy Spirit in His Triune nature – and the fact that He wants every human being to have that same community and relationship with Him and with each other. To that end we have the other text that we read earlier. When someone told Jesus that His mother and brothers were outside, wanting to speak to Him...

Slide: “48 He replied to him, **“Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?”** 49 Pointing to his disciples, he said, **“Here are my mother and my brothers. 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”**” (Matthew 12:48–50 NIV)

This is an absolutely awesome text, when you think about it. Jesus is crying out to you, deeply desiring the same intimacy and sense of family that He has within the Trinity. And again, wanting us to have that in our relationships with each other. And the fact is that God created us with that desire for community, for family.

In a recent survey published by AARP, more than one out of three adults 45 and over reported being chronically lonely. A decade earlier, only one out of five said that. With baby-boomers retiring at the rate of 10,000 a day, the number of lonely Americans will certainly grow higher.

Every week a sweet little old lady waited in line at the post office to buy two stamps. One day, as she got to the counter, the postal worker told her, “You know, you don't have to wait in

line to buys stamps. You can get them from the machine over there in books of twenty.” The little old lady responded, “Yes, but the machine doesn’t ask about my arthritis.” People long to be connected.

Some of you Baby-boomers will remember this familiar theme music:

Slide: Cheers

“Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name and they’re always glad you came. You want to go where people know people are all the same. You want to go where everybody knows your name.”

Folks, that’s powerful stuff and true. People do want that... I think that’s one of the reasons that show lasted as long as it did. It had nothing to do with the drinking and the bar, it was the sense of community. And folks, I may not be Norm, but I’ve had the community of sharing a beer or two with a friend. And that can be good. But I’m here to tell you that it can’t compare to the community we have here day in and day out in the Body of Christ, the Church. We truly are a family, brothers and sisters in Christ and of Christ. And yes, we’re a family with all of the positives and some of the negatives. Sometimes our church family relationships can get dicey, but in the Body of Christ we learn to forgive each other and love each other, sometimes despite each other... we know that we’re all the same... we’re all sinners in need of a Savior. A Savior who did come, despite us and our flaws, in fact a Savior who came to gather them all up... to take the worst in all of us and to bear the responsibility for it and be punished for it on the cross. And we have a Savior who also rose triumphant from the grave, and gives to you and all believers eternal life.

Folks, I want to close simply today with what I believe our response should be to all this – the words of our closing hymn:

388 — May the Mind of Christ My Savior

KATE B. WILKINSON

A. CYRIL BARHAM-GOULD

1. May the mind of Christ my Sav-ior Live in me from day to day,
2. May the Word of God dwell rich-ly In my heart from hour to hour,
3. May the peace of God my Fa-ther Rule my life in ev-'ry-thing,
4. May the love of Je-sus fill me As the wa-ters fill the sea;
5. May I run the race be-fore me, Strong and brave to face the foe,
6. May His beau-ty rest up-on me As I seek the lost to win,

By His love and pow'r con-trol-ling All I do and say.
So that all may see I tri-umph On-ly thru His pow'r.
That I may be calm to com-fort Sick and sor-row-ing.
Him ex-alt-ing, self a-bas-ing— This is vic-to-ry.
Look-ing on-ly un-to Je-sus As I on-ward go.
And may they for-get the chan-nel, See-ing on-ly Him.*

Tune: ST. LEONARDS