

Teachers notes

Please note that this document contains 3 different versions of the "Exploring the Word" worksheet. Each version contains the same Gospel texts, Reflection and questions, but with a different configuration of "alternative views".

activities

- ★ Research the status of women and children in Jesus' time. What similarities can be drawn between the two groups? Why did these two groups receive special attention from Jesus?
- ★ Build a list of 'child-like' characteristics. Identify ways in which individuals or the group could practise these characteristics as a way of welcoming the kingdom of God.



Why might the Pharisees have been trying to 'test' Jesus with their question about divorce?

Why do you think the gospel writer followed the question about divorce with the teaching about children?

What does it mean to welcome the kingdom of God?

What characteristics of little children might Jesus be encouraging us to adopt?



gospel Mk 10:2-16

Some Pharisees approached Jesus and asked, 'Is it against the law for a man to divorce his wife?' They were testing him. He answered them, 'What did Moses command you?' 'Moses allowed us' they said 'to draw up a writ of dismissal and so to divorce.' Then Jesus said to them, 'It was because you were so unteachable that he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. This is why a man must leave father and mother, and the two become one body. They are no longer two, therefore, but one body. So then, what God has united, man must not divide.' Back in the house the disciples questioned him again about this, and he said to them, 'The man who divorces his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another she is guilty of adultery too.'

People were bringing little children to him, for him to touch them. The disciples turned them away, but when Jesus saw this he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. I tell you solemnly, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' Then he put his arms round them, laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing.

reflection

In the Western world today, somewhere between one-third and one-half of marriages end in divorce. It's a statistic that we hear wheeled out as a sign of the collapse of family values in our society. However, the reverse statistic is also true: somewhere between one-half and two-thirds of marriages are lasting ones. In the last 30-40 years, divorce has transformed from being a shameful scandal to an accepted, even commonplace, fact of life. It would be uncommon not to know someone affected by divorce. Despite those who argue that divorce is too 'easy', it is an emotional and difficult decision for couples to reach and has rippling impacts on children, extended families and friends.

When the Pharisees in the gospel asked Jesus about the law regarding divorce, they really weren't interested in divorce; they wanted to check Jesus' orthodoxy - how he stood in relation to traditional teaching. Rather than respond to them directly, Jesus asks them first of all to name the teaching to which they refer. He then explains that Moses only ever wrote the instruction because the people were so unwilling to listen to God's way.

For the second time in the last few weeks, the gospel shows Jesus welcoming children and praising their attitude as the way to the kingdom of God. Children of the time had no status and were regarded as literally the property of their father. When Jesus laid his hands on the children and gave them his blessing, this was the action of a father 'claiming' the child as their own. To welcome the kingdom like a little child is to enter into living the kingdom of God without any claim to position or status; to recognise our complete dependence on others; to let go of our ideas of who is important and who is not; to allow ourselves to be 'claimed' by Jesus.

scriptural **context**

Discipleship

This section of Mark's Gospel explores what it means to be a disciple. While this particular passage may seem to be a bit out of place, Jesus seems to be stressing to the disciples that there are some bottom lines - some non-negotiables - when it comes to being a disciple. Unlike the Pharisees who are preoccupied with the letter of the Law, Jesus encourages his disciples to get beyond that and understand the spirit of the Law - God's dream for humankind. The shift in the passage to the focus on children seems a little disconnected but the whole passage is about living in the kingdom with the right attitude.

gospel focus

Like a little child

Most of us at some time or another have been told to 'grow up'; 'stop acting like a child'; or to 'act your age'. It implies that, as we grow older, we have to behave in a more 'responsible' or 'mature' way than when we were children. Jesus turns this on its head and tells us that unless we 'welcome the kingdom like a little child' we will never enter it. The gospels are full of stories about people who call on God's mercy because they recognise that without God they are nothing. When they subsequently receive God's mercy or healing they welcome it all the more - like a little child.

- ❓ Why might the Pharisees have been trying to 'test' Jesus with their question about divorce?
- ❓ Why do you think the gospel writer followed the question about divorce with the teaching about children?
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Historical

context

Writ of dismissal

*In Jewish tradition, a man could divorce his wife but a woman could not divorce her husband – she could only seek a court ruling to force her husband to divorce her. The grounds for divorce under biblical law were *ervat devar* – meaning 'some fault or indecency'. One legal tradition held that *ervat devar* applied exclusively to adultery while another applied it to anything that was 'offensive' to the husband. To divorce his wife, a man simply had to renounce his wife and ask a court to authorise a writ, or bill, of dismissal – his wife had no chance to challenge his decision.*

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