

Well, that was a joyful gospel reading don't you think? Divorce and adultery. When you just take the reading at face value, it is pretty condemning. But if you look at what Jesus was actually saying, then the true meaning has nothing to do with divorce or adultery.

Marriage then was very different than what it is today. Men effectively owned their daughters and they were an expense because the men had to pay for them. That is why a dowry was paid to a man when he married a woman by the woman's family.

Moses said that men were permitted divorce for something called “porneia” which some rabbis said refers to when a woman were unfaithful. However, other rabbis said that “porneia” could also include burning dinner or not being pretty enough. And if a man divorced a woman, then she would be forced to beg or forced into prostitution.

Overall, women had no rights in marriage. And so when Jesus explains his stance on divorce to his disciples he comes up with two stupid statements that makes absolutely no sense.

The first statement is “Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her.”

The adultery laws didn't allow for women to have adultery committed against them. So a woman could commit adultery against her husband by sleeping with another man. And a man could commit adultery against a man by sleeping with his wife. But if a man had sex with a prostitute he was not committing adultery against his wife because women were property. So Jesus seems to be talking nonsense because the law does not allow equality for women.

Jesus goes on to say: "And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery.”

This really confused the disciples because a woman could never divorce her husband. She was his property and had no rights. In the time of our gospel reading, the husband was the only one who was allowed to divorce.

I find it incredible that 2000 years ago, in a patriarchal society, a man stood up and imagined a completely different reality, a reality of complete equality between men and women.

In a few sentences, Jesus stated that women should be treated as equals with men which went totally against the belief of the day. But he didn't stop there because he also had something to say about children. Much like women, children had zero status at that time.

But Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

This could mean a number of things: children are a symbol of humility and vulnerability; they tend to live life more in the moment; they are powerless and have little control over their lives.

So what does all this mean for us today

I don't believe that Jesus is saying that people should remain in abusive marriages. Instead, I do believe that we should value everyone equally: rich and poor, male and female, young and old.

I believe we need humility in our spiritual lives. We need to recognize and embrace our smallness, like that of a child. In doing so, we realize that we need God to bring us through life and into eternal life. Just as a parent takes care of a child, God takes care of us.