



Thoughts on the Journey...

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When I attended grade school, at St. Teresa of Avila in Cincinnati, there were three things that would put you on the HIT LIST OF SHAME: 1. getting held back a year, 2. wetting your pants in class, or 3. coming from a divorced family. In my second grade class, Janet Hangehold rang the bell on that list all three times and as a result was looked at differently than the rest of us. The only time she was redeemed, was once a year when we were allowed to bring a pet for show-and-tell. Janet had a pet raccoon (on a rhinestone studded leash!) and for that 8 hours, she was queen for the day. But, the very next morning her status returned to *the girl from a divorced home, who should have been a year ahead of us, who had an accident and wet her pants.* What a rough way to go for a little girl who just wanted to be loved and accepted like the rest of us.

I thought of Janet as I sat in a room at the Lancaster courthouse 34 years later. It was a very rough day during a very dark time. My husband and I were sitting alone in separate rooms while two attorneys were in another room negotiating the details of our future lives. After two hours of angst, another hearing for my divorce was over. We were no further ahead than we were the six other times we had done this rigmarole. I was exhausted and angry – so angry that I could have spit nails. Each time I left one of these hearings, it felt like a piece of my soul was being ripped away. How many times did I ask myself, “How fast do I have to be going in this car to crash into a tree and not wake up a quadriplegic.” I was holding on tight to my anger thinking it was fortifying me in this fight. I couldn’t have been more wrong.

It was time to pick my children up at St. Mary grade school. They piled in the van with their little uniforms, their book bags and lunch boxes, then buckled their seat belts, now ready for the ride home. The expression on their faces told me they could tell I had been crying. It was quiet until we were on the backroads going toward home. Then, I unleashed hell with my words, criticizing their father and spewing the details of our dysfunction with no regard to how these sweet children, who loved both of us, were processing this evil malignancy. About ten minutes into my rant, I remember yelling out, “Can you believe he is doing this to us?” Foolishly, I expected a response of allegiance, a coming to “my side - the right side”, a joining in a pact of loathing. Instead, what I received was a deafening quiet that brought my tirade to a screeching halt. I positioned the rear-view mirror so I could see them. What I saw that afternoon shamed me to my core. My eldest

daughter was ferociously biting her finger nails, my son’s head was tilted forward with his hands over his ears, and my youngest daughter was looking out the car window with tears rolling down her face. This sobering scene imbedded itself in my memory that stays with me to this day. As their mother, I claimed to love my children more than anything else in the world, but this was not the face of love. As justified as I felt in the ‘rightness’ of position, I was spinning a web of hatred.

From that moment forward, I took a deep look inside and had to ask myself the hard questions. Who was I becoming? Was I living the love that Christ called me to live? Was my anger and bitterness now winning the battle of my heart and consuming the love I am called to live? Did I love my anger more than my children?

In the gospel of Mark this week, the Pharisees, in an attempt to test Jesus asked the question, “Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife? It was a loaded question; they weren’t seeking Jesus’ wisdom; they were looking for a way to entrap him. Jesus knowing what they were up to, first identified their hard hearts and then responded with a reference to the Book of Genesis. Jesus pointed back to God’s original intent, that marriage is a covenant relationship in which a man and a woman come together as one and live out their life in mutual love and devotion to one another. Then, speaking of married couples, Jesus said:

“They are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, no human being must separate.”

From the moment I saw the pain on my children’s faces on that transforming ride home, I knew I had to change my stinking thinking. Regardless of our civil divorce, I had formed family with a man I had vowed to love until death. Through the hard work of forgiveness and reconciliation on both of our parts, my husband and I have remained faithful to our sacramental vows and have developed a deep and lasting love for one another. Love is hard work and even though our covenant together is unconventional, in the sense that we live separately, we love our family as one.

There are many people in our community who have/are suffering through the pain of divorce. Each situation is different and God know what’s at the heart of their pain and struggle. In the words of Jesus: “*Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you...for I am gentle and lowly in heart; and you will find rest for your souls.*”