

12 June 2011
Malekzadeh-Libby Wedding

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“It’s All About Jesus”

Text: Proverbs 3:1-6; Acts 2:1-4, 12-21; John 3:17-21

Elizabeth and Rich:

Wedding are special days. The special clothes and flowers, the presents, family and friends coming in from all over, the smiles that just can’t stop. There’s a special joy at a wedding - the joy of love, of a new beginning, a new family being formed, and of moving into the future together.

And so there may be some people here today a bit surprised at the readings and hymns you selected - they’re a bit out of the ordinary. There’s no talk of love or marriage. In fact, from the readings and hymns, you’d think the big thing happening today is Jesus and what He did and does, and not about you two at all! That today is not about a beautiful bride, or her handsome groom, or proud parents. It’s as though you think your wedding is all about Jesus!

Well you’re right.

Oh, some would say that we shouldn’t talk about sin and forgiveness on a day like today - that talk like that is a downer at such a joyful time. But what could be more wonderful and joyful than forgiveness? And what is more vital? Both in our relationship with God, and in our relationships with each other - and especially in a marriage. And so this is, in fact, a good focus for a service like this. For it is not you or your love or promises that will keep your marriage together - it is Christ and His forgiveness. The forgiveness you will both need all throughout your married life together.

That forgiveness begins with God. It was His idea. It was His answer to our sin. Our sin that brought death into the world and separation from God. And still does. For look at all the relationships that die, and marriages that die, and friendships that die, and families that are torn apart in our world today. Look at all the abuse and perversion and wreckage of lives beaten up and left for dead. And look at your own heart, and see the sin, the hatred, the anger, the perversion, the uncleanness that even lives there. As we heard, ***God didn’t send His Son into the world to condemn the world*** - we do that ourselves! No, He sent His Son into the world *to save us from all this*. Someone to die our death and break its grip on us and our world. Someone to take our condemnation and leave behind a blessing. Someone to enter

into the wreckage of this world and raise it back to life again.

And that's exactly what Jesus did. His death and resurrection give us hope in a world gone mad with sin . . . that there is forgiveness, that there is life, that there is love and peace. Not only because He came and lived those things, but because He is still coming and giving those things to us. That all that sin in our hearts be forgiven. That we not live a life that will end in death, but die a death that will end in life. That we live in love that is not just self-gratification, but which gives our very "selves" to others. And live with hearts and minds and spirits in peace.

If there is a secret to a successful marriage, that's it. Jesus and His forgiveness. That you live in His love and forgiveness and so give that love and forgiveness to each other. When you want to and when you don't want to. When you feel like it and when you don't feel like it. When he doesn't deserve it and when she doesn't deserve it, because neither of you deserve it! But Jesus came and died for you not because you deserved it, but exactly because you didn't. And that's love. Not the kind of love the world knows, but the love of Christ Jesus. The love which caused Him to lay down His life for His Bride, the Church, and which will enable you to lay down your lives for one another, in forgiveness, in service, and in love.

We heard also today of Pentecost - the festival we celebrated in Church this morning - when Jesus sent His Holy Spirit fully and completely upon His Church. When that happened, we heard that the apostles were able to speak in other tongues - foreign languages - that all people in the world could hear of Jesus. Well, with Jesus as the center of your marriage, you two will also speak a tongue that is foreign to the world, as you speak and live forgiveness to one another. The world knows little of forgiveness, preferring instead revenge, or keeping score, or demanding that if you get yours then I get mine. But your words of forgiveness to one another will transcend all that and be the bond in your marriage that no man will be able to put asunder. For your union will not be just a thing of this world, but of Christ.

And so you are beginning your married life together here in the Church, this place which is not primarily for advice, instruction, or counseling, but that is all about forgiveness. The water of forgiveness, Holy Baptism. The words of forgiveness, the Holy Gospel. And the Body and Blood of forgiveness, the Holy Supper. You can get married anywhere - but it means something to get married here, where our Lord gives such great gifts and where we receive them. It is a powerful testimony and confession of what this day is all about.

Now you're going to give yourselves to one another, fully and completely Not 50-50, but 100%, just as Christ gave Himself for His Bride. You will have days when that's easy and days when that's not so easy, but never a day when you won't need

each other's forgiveness. And you'll be tempted not to forgive, to hold a grudge, to make him - or her - earn it! Because to forgive, to give yourself 100%, to serve like Christ, well, can be frightening. But as we heard from Proverbs earlier: ***Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.*** Don't trust your heart or feelings or the wisdom of the world - trust in the Lord and His Word. For only in Him is the love, the forgiveness, the strength, the peace, and the life that you need.

So Elizabeth and Rich, we rejoice with you this day, and rejoice in the goodness of God who has given you as gifts to one another. But even more, we rejoice in the love of our heavenly Father who sent His Son to make this day possible. Without Him, there would be no marriage, for there would be no love, and there would be no life. But in Him, we not only have all this, but also the hope of eternal life - an eternal wedding feast in heaven. The joy of your wedding today points us to that hope.

For yes, while this day is *for* you, it is not *about* you. **It's all about Jesus.** And my prayer for you is that each and every day of your married life will be as well. Each day, a day to rejoice in the Lord and His love for you.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

(Thanks to Rev. Wil Weedon for some of the thoughts and words in the second paragraph of this sermon.)