

3 July 2004
Marriage of Jonathan Malekzadeh
and Viviana Figueroa

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Alexandria, VA

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“What Have You Heard?”

Text: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Ephesians 5:21-33; Matthew 19:3-6

Dear Friends, and especially this day, Jonathan and Viviana:

When Jesus preached His Sermon on the Mount, He used a certain phrase over and over. He introduced much of His teaching with this phrase. Because there was a lot of misinformation going around. People were believing whatever the majority was saying, or whatever seemed right, or made things easy, or because its just what they wanted to believe. Jesus wanted to cut through all of that and teach them the truth. Teach them what God had to say. And so to do this, Jesus used this phrase: ***“You have heard that it was said . . . But I say to you.”*** (Mt 5) This evening, I would like to use that phrase, because there is a lot of misinformation about marriage going around these days, and it is important that we all, and especially you, Jonathan and Viviana, know the truth. That you know – not what everyone else says – but what God has to say.

And so first, ***“You have heard that is was said”*** that marriage is a partnership. Two people who love each other teaming up. And these days it is being said that these two people can be *any* two people, even people of the same sex. . . . But what does God have to say? We heard these words from Matthew: ***“Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.’ ”***

Marriage is not a partnership – it is, in fact, much more than that. Partnerships are business transactions. Partnerships come and go; they are made and dissolved. Not so a marriage. Today you are becoming ***one flesh***. Whereas before you were two, now you are becoming one. No longer me, but we. United so closely that you will become one in heart and mind and will and desire. And this is a miracle. It is an act of God. An act of creation. This is not something that we can do. But as God has brought you together, so He will now unite you. Not until you get tired of each other; not until a better offer comes along; but until death parts you. And that vow that you will make to each other today, that promise that this is for life and that divorce is not an option – will give you the trust and confidence this marriage needs. That (unlike a partnership) when you mess up,

your husband is not leaving you. That when you have troubles, your wife is not leaving you. That when you have those days when you are, quite frankly, unlovable, your spouse will love you anyway. God will give you that love and forgiveness. For what He creates, He cares for and He keeps. And know that He will do that for you.

The second thing that ***“You have heard that is was said”*** that marriage is a 50-50 proposition. Give and take. Half and half. And you know what? That sounds really good! But it never works out that way. Because to say that your marriage is 50-50 is to introduce a measuring rod into your relationship. And you will begin to keep track of what you do. A mentally tally that, *“I’ve done this, so he has to do that!”* And it will never seem equal! Each of you will always think you’re giving more than the other, whether its 51-49, 70-30, or whatever. And then you’ll feel gypped, and hard feelings and fights will arise, because she’s not holding up her end of the bargain! And now your marriage has become a bargaining chip!

But what does God have to say? We heard these words from Ephesians: ***“Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.”*** Or in other words, God says marriage is not 50-50, it is 100-0. You each give yourself completely, 100%, to your spouse. Not in order to get something back! But completely selflessly, out of love. And the model Paul gives in these verses is the relationship between Christ and His bride, the Church.

Now many people today read these verses from Ephesians and think they demean women. *What do you mean I have to submit! . . .* But that’s not at all what these verses say. There is no talk of domination in these verses; no talk of inferiority; no mention of forcing. Rather, it speaks of willing, loving, joyful submission. And Jonathan, as the husband, you take the lead in this, just as Christ did. Jesus did not say, *“Okay, once these dirty rotten sinners submit to me and do what I tell them, then I’ll die for them!”* No, He did it first. He laid down His life for us, dying a horrible and humiliating death on the cross, to rescue us, to save us, and to make us His own in the forgiveness of our sins. His love would let Him do nothing less. And this, Jonathan, He is calling you to do today. To give yourself up for Viviana. To be humiliated for her sake. To give up everything, 100%, even your life, for her. Not in order to get something back, but simply because your love will let you do nothing less.

And because Jesus did this for us, we, the Church, willingly and joyfully submit ourselves to Him. Not because we have to, but because we have been overwhelmed with the love of our Saviour. And Viviana, that is what your Lord is calling you to do today. To give up yourself, 100%, for Jonathan. Not in order to get something back, but simply because your love will let you do nothing less. . . . And following this pattern, of mutual submission, you will find that far from feeling gypped, or that you are giving more than

the other – you will find that you each receive more than you give. For as you are now becoming one flesh, in giving to the other, you are, in fact, receiving as well!

And then third, and finally, ***“You have heard that it was said”*** that the foundation of a successful marriage is your love and commitment to each other. That if you love each other enough, and are committed to each other enough, and work hard enough at your marriage, then it will be successful. . . . But the truth is that you can’t do that. You’re both sinners. Your love will run both hot and cold. Your feelings will come and go. You’re both going to mess up and let the other down. You’ll make mountains out of mole hills. You’ll find that you’re not strong enough.

And so it is good that God has told us that there is another foundation. We heard these words from Ecclesiastes: ***“a threefold cord is not quickly broken.”*** And that third cord, the foundation of your marriage, will be Christ. He will keep you together. He will give you what you are lacking, and work in you what you cannot do. The love you give to each other is the love that He has given you. The forgiveness that you give to each other is the forgiveness that He has given you. And as you stay in His love and forgiveness, as you pray together, and read His Word together, and worship together and receive Christ’s body and blood together, He will provide all that you need. And so as your life of faith, and your relationship with your Saviour, is your top priority, your foundation will be secure.

Oh, you’re still going to have tough times, and disagreements, and everything else all married couples go through. But there will be a great difference in your marriage. ***A third cord***, that cannot be broken. For your Saviour once was broken – broken in death on the cross. But as He is now alive in His resurrection, He cannot die again. He has triumphed over all your enemies – over sin and death and devil and the grave, and now lives to give you that same victory. And it is yours as children of God. And as God has brought you together in love, so He will now keep you together in Him. His love, His forgiveness, His life, His promises – all are yours. And as you have freely received these, freely give them to one another.

“You have heard that it was said . . .” Many things you have heard. But today God proclaims to you good news, wonderful news, *true* wisdom. He says to you, ***“You are one.”*** God richly bless you today, as you so appropriately included in your wedding bulletin, as you begin your life together as one in Christ.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.