

26 June 2007
Wedding of Mary Veith and Ned Moerbe

Mt. Olive Lutheran Church
Miami, OK

Jesu Juva

“A Promise You Can Count On”

Text: Ephesians 5:1-2, 15-33; Matthew 20:20-28; Joshua 24:14-18

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Most people these days enter marriage thinking that “love will keep us together.” The love that we have for each other, the love today on display, the love embodied in our vows made to one another, will overcome all temptations, all obstacles, and all challenges.

And then reality sets in!

You find out it's not quite so easy to overlook those little, annoying faults you didn't know *she* had, and the baggage *he* is bringing with him into this marriage. There will be days when you are unsatisfied with each other, when your patience runs thin, when there's too much “poorer” and not enough “richer,” when the sinner in you sees the sinner in the other. Like the people of Israel we heard of in the reading from Joshua, you are making vows today you cannot keep. Like the disciples we heard of in Matthew, your desire to be served will be greater than your desire to serve one another. And you'll realize you don't even know what love is. You thought you did, and then you got married.

Now that sounds all gloomy and bitter. Not a fitting message for such a joyful day as this! But it is important so that we see clearly what is happening here today. And that all that I said doesn't mean there won't be love in your marriage – there will be!

But it won't be your love, from the bottom of your heart, but a love that comes from outside of you, and is given to you. The love of God in Jesus Christ, who is uniting you today as husband and wife. Today is not your work, but His. AND SO

IT IS NOT YOUR LOVE THAT WILL KEEP YOUR MARRIAGE TOGETHER, IT IS YOUR MARRIAGE THAT WILL KEEP YOUR LOVE TOGETHER. You are taking each other today not as friends, or lovers, or partners – but as gifts from your gift-giving God.

And so it is not what you promise each other today that is all important, but rather what your Saviour promises to do for you. That as He unites you together here today, so He will continue to unite you. He does not start you on your way and then wish you well, but will be with you through it all. Giving you His love to give to each other, but even more giving you His *forgiveness* to give to each other.

Which is why we are gathered here today in *this* place – this forgiveness place. Before a **font** filled with the water of forgiveness, a **pulpit** filled with the words of forgiveness, and an **altar** filled with the body and blood of forgiveness. This place is not primarily for advice, instruction, or counseling, but where forgiveness of sins is constantly given. You can get married anywhere, but it means something to get married here – especially where you, Mary, first received the faith and the forgiveness of your sins in Holy Baptism. You are confessing that this is what you need not only for your lives, but for your marriage. You need His love. You need His forgiveness. You need the One who never fails.

Today in the reading from Ephesians we heard again of Him and His great love for His bride, the Church. His love not for a *selfless* bride, but a selfish one. His love not for a devoted bride, but an adulterous one. A bride who continually turned away and stained herself with sin. A bride who did not deserve His love. . . . And yet He loves her. He cannot do otherwise, and in His great love, He came and laid down His life for her. Not waiting for her to clean herself up, but coming to wash her with His blood and make her holy and radiant. Though it meant going to the cross. To be a bridegroom of blood and die so His bride might live.

That is the love that we live in as children of God, and in which you will now live in your new offices of husband and wife. And you are confessing today that this is what you want to be the model for your marriage – the selflessness, the serving, the love, and the forgiveness of Christ and His bride, the Church. That you, **Ned**, will give up everything for Mary, and that you, **Mary**, will submit to Ned and give up everything for him. Pretty tall order, to be such a husband! And a pretty

impossible assignment, to be such a bride! What makes you think you can live up to such promises?

It is faith that enables you to make such promises. **Faith not in each other, but in your Saviour Jesus Christ.** Who promises to **be** in your marriage what you cannot be. Who promises to **do** what you cannot do. Who promises to **give** to you what you need to give to one another. And He will do so as the place where your marriage starts is the place where it is also sustained. **You and your house will serve the Lord because your Lord in His house serves you.** Serving you as your Saviour comes to you and places into your mouth His body, crucified for you; and pours onto your lips His blood, shed for you. Serving you as you come as failures and He washes you clean in His forgiveness. Serving you as receive His blessing, and then go and live as His blessing to one another.

And so Mary and Ned, we rejoice with you this day, that your Saviour will do all this for you. We rejoice in the goodness of our Father and His Son, who gifts you to each other. And that it is truly His work, well, . . . I know, because when I first met Mary, she let me know in her typically blunt and straightforward way, that she no way, no how, no where will ever date, or even *think* about dating, let alone *marry* a seminarian or pastor! (*I had to get that in!*) But what a wonderful day today, as we celebrate the work of God. Today is no fairy tale, but even better. Today is of the Gospel. Our Lord making one flesh out of two. Giving us an icon of the Gospel, until He calls us to His own wedding feast, of the Lamb in His kingdom, which will have no end.

God's richest blessings to you Mary and Ned, from this day forth and even forevermore.

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

(Some thoughts and phrases in this sermon from Rev. Chad Bird, *Christ Crucified: Lutheran Sermons* [Grand Rapids, Emmanuel Press, 2005], 39-41).