

16 March 2013
Marriage of Ashley Knox and David Yarbrough

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

"I Will . . . forgive"

Text: Matthew 19:4-6; Ruth 1:16-17; 1 Corinthians 12:31b-13:13

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.

The church for a long time prohibited marriages during the season of Lent. It was thought that the focus of this season, on the suffering and death of our Saviour, and the fasting, prayer, and almsgiving that went along with that focus, precluded such joy. I think that is why there are so many weddings in May and June - those are the months that typically come after Lent, and so the months of many marriages.

But as I thought about that this week, I also thought that having your wedding during Lent gives us a powerful reminder of what Lent is really all about - that Jesus did all this, all His suffering and death, for *His* Bride, the Church. We heard from the lips of Jesus this day those words from the very first wedding, the wedding of Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter 1: ***"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."*** And that is, in fact, what Jesus did for us. He left His Father in heaven and in His incarnation literally became one flesh with us. And then as He hung on the cross, He left His mother to the care of His disciple and clung to His Bride. So much He loved her that He would not let her die in her sins. So much He loved her that He would not come down from the cross. So much He loved her that He would not leave her. So much He loved us.

David, that's the love you will promise Ashley in just a few moments. Not a love that's a *feeling*, but a love that's a *commitment*, a promise, with Jesus as your model. And Ashley, you will promise David your love that will submit to him as the church submits to Christ. Which is not a submission that is forced, but a returning of the love that you have been given. The love that is described in the words from First Corinthians that we heard - love that suffers for the other, love that refuses to put itself over the other, love that would rather die than cease to love. That is not a love, quite frankly, that is found in us human beings. It is the love that comes only from the One who is love. But as He has given you that love, so now you begin to give that love to one another. And you'll promise to do so.

But you won't. Not always. Your sinful nature will get in the way. Count on it. And so it seems as if you are making promises to each other today that you can't keep. But it only seems that way. Because in this marriage you will not be alone. The One

who is uniting you as one flesh, the One who is the source of the love that you need, will continue to be with you. And that means not only that Christ is the cornerstone of Your marriage, but that the first bricks built upon that cornerstone are the bricks of forgiveness. For there is no better way to say *I love you* than to ask for forgiveness. And there is no better way to act in love than to forgive your spouse. For that is the love of Christ given to you; the forgiveness of your sins that reconciled you to your heavenly Father.

And so with your promises today you are really promising forgiveness. You are promising not to hold grudges, not to seek revenge, not to make your spouse *earn* his or her way back into your good graces, and not to let your sins divide you or rent asunder what God today is joining together. Your "I will" means *I will forgive you*. Sin and Satan will try to divide you; the love and forgiveness of Christ will hold you together.

So our good and gracious Lord, who gives us far more than we can ask or imagine, is giving you to each other today. You are His gifts to one another. In the beginning, the very first gift God gave to Adam after creating him and placing him into this world was his wife, Eve. And the very first gift Eve received was the joyous outburst of her husband, so filled with love for her that he couldn't contain himself. The creation he had been given was perfect, but it was nothing compared to the beauty of his bride.

But it didn't take long for Satan to do his dastardly work and divide them. After they sinned, they not only hid from God, they hid also from one another. And the ugly finger of blame came out too. And it would have stayed that way had God not been there to rescue them. They were not alone in their marriage just as you will not be alone. And His forgiveness to them was then their forgiveness to one another, as it will be for you. So stay in His forgiveness. Be fed by Him always. Receive from Him what you need for one another. And see in each other the gift of God that He has so wonderfully given to you.

That's the gift Ruth received as well. The gift that made it impossible for her to even think about going back to her country and the false gods of that land. She had been given the forgiveness of the Lord - how could she go back? What gift is greater than that? So no, she said, ***"where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God."*** She had tasted the love of God that would give everything for her. She would cling to the God who clung to her, and to the people that were His people. And so now you also.

For truly He is the *Fount of Every Blessing*, as we just sang. His blessing which brought the two of you together. The blessing of His Word which created you, His blood that redeemed you, and His Spirit which sanctifies you. And as you make

your promises to each other now, remember His promise to you when He baptized you and said: *you are mine*. And as you begin your life together, rely on that promise, remembering always that even as you are united **by** Christ this day in marriage, you are also united **in** Christ. And that is the greatest blessing of all.

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