

“GOD POINTS TOWARDS MARRIAGE”

Epiphany 2C January 17, 2010

Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:1-5;

1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

Introduction:

Today I am beginning a loosely organized sermon series about Marriage. Sunday, February 14th will be the culmination of this time spent examining Marriage. The focus of our service that day will be about renewing our marriage vows – or if a couple desires, we can also marry them. So, the 14th will be a day of celebration in our worship service, and a time to celebrate love at our Reception, where there will be cake, ice cream, picture taking opportunities – like a wedding reception.

Before I go any further I want to state that some of what I believe God has taught me about marriage is about how to live life; it is not just for married folks. So, I don't want those of you who are single to drop out during all this and not be part of our February 14th celebration. You won't be renewing your wedding vows (unless you want to), but you are part of the family witnessing those who will be; and, you just might hear something in these coming weeks that blesses your life, or which you can pass along to other family members to help them.

We are a church family and we go through these things together.

The first thing I want to share with you about

marriage is this -

Marriage Is A Big Deal With God:

If you were to sit down and read the entire Bible – Old and New Testaments – looking for instances where God talks about marriage, or illustrates lessons about life through the metaphor of marriage, you would come away shaking your head. That’s what happened to me

I was in a really bad marriage. I felt guilty and angry about it, but I didn’t know how to fix it. I was also conducting between 15 - 25 weddings each year, so I was spending a lot of time in pre-marriage counseling. I truly wanted to say things to those I was counseling that would add insight, grant wisdom, and increase the value of marriage in their lives.

I didn’t want anyone else to be as miserable as I was, so I began a long prayer time and Bible study about Marriage. I wanted to sharpen myself so I could become a better instrument of God’s peace. What I am going to share with you over these next few weeks came out of that time of prayer and study.

Almost the first thing I realized is that marriage is a big deal with God. Marriage is not just another activity humans participate in. It goes much deeper than that. What got me first thinking, and praying about the

importance of marriage, came from participating in so many marriage ceremonies.

In every church ceremony I've looked at is the expression that marriage was created by God – created by God! Marriage isn't just something we humans made up. It did not just evolve within human culture. Marriage was designed by God, and given to us as a gift with a purpose. When you look at human beings around the globe you see people with many different cultural differences, living different lifestyles, speaking different languages, etc. But, if you look deeper and ask, "What do all people share in common?" you begin to see life differently.

For example, all humans speak to one another; and we are capable of speaking complex thoughts, deep thoughts, profound thoughts. We don't have a common language, but language is held in common. Music is held in common. Belief in someone greater than ourselves – God – is held in common. Living in organized societal structures is held in common; and Marriage is held in common.

When I say, "held in common" I mean this activity is something that is part of what it means to be human. Humans marry. There is no large, definable

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group of humans anywhere who do not practice this thing called marriage. When I see activities held in common, I see God's design at work.

Everywhere in the world, in the most sophisticated or primitive cultures, you will find men and women living in this unique arrangement we call marriage. In the most primitive cultures a man and woman will find each other; stand alone under God's sky, look each other in the eyes and say, "Umm! Me for you; You for me?" And, depending upon that culture's traditions, they will enter into a marriage relationship. Then, they will be recognized as a couple, allowed to live together, and any children coming from their union will be readily accepted into the tribe.

At another time I will share with you "why" God instituted marriage, but today's point remains: marriage is a big deal with God. That point is strengthened in today's lessons,

Marriage In Isaiah and John:

When I earlier said that the metaphor of marriage is throughout the Bible, today's lesson from Isaiah underscores that point. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah illustrates God's enduring desire to save Israel using the language of Marriage. Listen again to

Isaiah 62:1-5 (NIV).

¹For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch. ²The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow. ³You will be a crown of splendor in the LORD'S hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. ⁴No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, ("My Delight Is in Her"), and your land Beulah (Married); for the LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married. ⁵As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons (or, Your Builder) marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

Did you hear the marriage language and imagery? That is not a historical accident. It is by the design of God. That leads us to

The Wedding At Cana:

Our Gospel lesson from John records Jesus' first public appearance after His baptism and days of fasting and temptation in the wilderness. Think about that a second. His first public appearance was at a Wedding. I could be just a coincidence, unless God is making a point about the importance of marriage?

I think it was probably a wedding of someone Jesus was related to, because the text says that Jesus

and His disciples were invited. I think it would have been presumptuous for his Mother to say, “I’m going to the wedding of our next door neighbor. It would be a good thing if you dropped by to pay your respects; and Oh, by-the-way, bring those other eleven guys with you.” I think only a mother who was part of the official wedding crew could have gotten away with that.

It reminds me of the 1988 movie with Kurt Russell, “*Backdraft*”. Kurt Russell was the Commanding Officer of Fire Engine #17. They were the city’s toughest crew. Their motto was, “*One go, all go!*” It was dramatized in a scene where one of the men has fallen through a hole in a roof that is collapsing. One of his fellow fire fighters catches his hand and others grab the guy holding onto his mate, who is dangling over a raging fire. He shouts up to his crewmen, “let me go before I pull you into the fire with me.” From above he hears, “One go, all go!”; and of course they pull him to safety.

I have a sense Jesus and His disciples were like that, “one go, all go!”. I suspect his mother knew that, which is why they were all invited to the wedding; which is why I think it was the wedding of someone related to Mary.

The second clue it was a family wedding is the

role Jesus' mother plays when the wine begins to run out. She assumes responsibility for solving the problem; and her perceived answer doesn't lie in making a quick run the local ABC; nor sending a frantic message to the local winery. Her answer lies in her son – Jesus. I'm convinced Jesus was related to either the Bride or Groom because his mother is acting like an aunt at a nieces' wedding. I say that from the experience I had yesterday.

Yesterday, one of our nieces was married, the older sister of Jennifer. As a result there were five women who were all in charge at the wedding. There was her mother, her grandmother, and three aunts. It gave me fresh insight into the Wedding scene at Cana to which Jesus was invited.

Now, I could go off and do a magnificent job of linking Jesus' changing of water into wine with how much God cares for our every need; and when God meets a need it is usually beyond our anticipation or expectation. But, that is not where I'm going today.

When you consider our Old Testament lesson and today's Gospel story there is a point being made about God involvement in this institution called marriage.

It is a big deal with God because it was created by God to serve as a earthly template for spiritual

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salvation. It is not an accident that one of the symbols for marriage is the Triangle. It represents the extra strength a relationship has when God is part of the two individual's lives, and thus also part of their life together. God designed this relationship and wants to be part of it.

So, on February 14th, we are going to celebrate God's love for us, our love for God, and our love for each other through the reaffirmation of our wedding vows. Spread the word, invite others to join with us. Like other things God has shown us to offer this past year, it will be free – just like God's love for us.