

## IN NOMINE JESU

### UNITED IN CHRIST

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Our sermon for this celebration of Kevin and Ashley's one-flesh union in Christ is taken from our inspired readings. Christian marriage, which is biblically defined as the union of one man and one woman in Christ, is a work of God that He means to last for a lifetime. Were you aware that today we have at least one example of that reality at this Lord's service? It is a fact that God has included in this congregation at least one husband and wife who have celebrated 60 years of being cemented together into a one-flesh union. Are there any more marriages in Christ that have lasted that many years among us today?

Sixty years is near the goal which Ashley and Kevin were asked to imagine for their marriage. They were asked to picture themselves after a lifetime of marriage, in the hope that they will keep that image before them all the years of their life. In doing so, they will have a picture which, in accord with the Word of God today, they will need to sustain them into a one-flesh union throughout many decades, with many children - we pray -- in all of life's downs and ups. This much is true: what this man and woman may learn after one day of marriage, and that couple certainly knows after 21,900 days of being united in Christ, is that marriage is not a casual union, nor a mere civil contract.

You see, God takes marriage seriously. Christian marriage, one-man and one-woman united in Christ, bonded by forgiveness, joined by the Word of God, is not primarily the result of the man and woman who speak their vows. It is foremost the work of God. It is His Word which prompts, undergirds, strengthens, and holds fast the words which Kevin and Ashley are about to speak.

It is the Creator's love and will for the highest of His creatures that is declared when God in our flesh says, *from the beginning, when God created Man, male and female He made them.* It is God's undying, self-sacrificing, unconditional love that brings about, sustains, and blesses the man and woman whom He unites with His

Word. It is God's revealed will that Kevin and Ashley today be, through the covenant of marriage, glued-together in a human/divine bond that is meant to be, and is in Christ, greater than any other human relationship. (Watch carefully, as Kevin begins to practice godly care when he pledges his troth to Ashley).

The image of Christ in the home begins for this couple here today. The texts that you have heard today have been selected by Ashley and Kevin that you might hear in them their confession of the Faith – in Christ above all – and in God's working His will for them in holy matrimony. They have cared for and respected you enough to provide you with the means to easily carry home God's Word regarding His covenant of marriage. It is our prayer that you ponder God's Word, to test your own life against it, and when you find your life, or your marriage, wanting, to hear in it God's forgiveness.

God's forgiveness, which restores the erring -- in life, in marriage, in family, in human relationships -- is that which brings faithfulness. You, Ashley and Kevin, and you, invited guests at this wedding feast in the Word of our Lord, have heard of God's forgiveness, and been shown in His sacrificial love, in this service. In the Letter to the Church at Corinth, the Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, wrote foremost of God's love. This is done, that having been loved, you may be freed to love.

That is declared from one word from the Apostle's letter which has been repeated eight times. Our translations render it, "love." Yet that word can mean so many things to our ears. For St. Paul, and for the Christian faithful to whom His letter was first read, this word translated, "love," did not hold much in the way of romantic overtones. Neither was it a description of brotherly or sisterly love. Rather, as the Holy Spirit uses it, this type of love is summed up with twelve descriptive phrases. Genuine, godly love, that which God has first for us sinful humans is, described as first, long-suffering, and, second, kind.

That is not how the culture outside the Church would begin to define love. In our age, love can be defined as first: that which makes the individual feel happy; and second, love in our culture is defined as that which makes the individual feel loved. Love in our society is that which is for the individual, to be shared as long

as, "I feel happy and loved." That thinking is not reflective of the revealed mind of God, nor is it the teaching of His true Church.

From God's perspective, love is patient and gracious. Such love is summed up in Christ Jesus, the Bridegroom of the Church Who took upon Himself the punishment His Bride deserves. God displayed such long-suffering love in that He waited thousands of years, all the while continually calling His Beloved back to Himself. Then, after He had done and said more to work a turning of heart in His Beloved than any man living or dead, God poured out His wrath.

Even in His wrath, He shows the attributes of true sacrificial love: He acted out of kindness and graciousness to His Bride, the Church. When, in time, God was done with being patient with the sins of His people, He poured out His full, fiery, burning wrath, not on us, but on His Son. For a brief moment in time God rained His wrath down upon the Bridegroom of the Church, Jesus the Christ. In His distress, the Father looked away. In His anguish, the Father was silent. And, in His love for us, He took away His wrath from us, carried it into death and the grave.

Such is God's acted out definition of love. He is long-suffering and kind. His sacrificial love does *not continue to boil with envy*; it does *not continue to act presumptuously*; it does *not continue to puff up*; it does *not behave indecently*; it does *not continue to seek things for itself*; it does *not continue to be irritated*; it does *not continue to count up evil*; it does *not rejoice over unrighteousness*. How different is God's love that than shown by the world!

That is the love to which this couple is being called into by the Word of God. It is the love which can only be fulfilled by remaining united in Christ through His Word and the Holy Spirit. This union will be tested, for we are all creatures in this fallen world. There will be moments over the next sixty or so years when you think you cannot stand your spouse for another second.

When that happens, know that you will be free to exercise godly, sacrificial, unconditional love for him or for her. That means that you, as you are reminded through the Word of God which you have chosen for this day, you in Christ will be free to love with long-suffering and graciousness. It means that the love which God has given you will free you to exercise a love which, in *all things*,

*continues to cover, in all things to continue to believe, in all things continues to hope, in all things continue to bear patiently.*

We are no longer speaking of the human feelings and emotions which our culture prizes so highly. Emotions are fleeting human experiences. God's sacrificial, unconditional love endures. As His love is declared through His Word, you are being freed in Christ to hold fast to God's definitions of love throughout your married life -- until it pleases God to carry you to His eternal Wedding Feast.

It is our prayer that you would remember this day, from this service, that God's sacrificial love for you, Ashley and Kevin, never fails. To ensure that you might know that to be true, He has sealed His covenant with you in blood, the blood of Christ Jesus our Lord. Whenever you take His gifts into your ears, hearts, minds, and mouths, you are empowered to remember His covenant of promises.

Here, before God and people, you are executing more than a marriage contract. You are enacting a covenant. In doing so, you are asking God to seal by His Word your two independent natures into one dependent person – united in Christ and dependent upon His love for a lifetime.

**The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus**

A Wedding Sermon for Ashley and Kevin Hawkins

Genesis 2:18-24; I Corinthians 12:31b-13:13; Matthew 19:4-6

June 9, 2012

*Paster Michael A. Morehouse*

**SOLI DEO GLORIA**