

FROM ME TO WE
THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY
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BECKY ROBBINS-PENNIMAN
CHURCH OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD, DUNEDIN, FL

The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage is one of the sacraments of the Church.

The Book of Common Prayer [p. 423] teaches that marriage is for mutual joy, help and comfort, noting that God delights when two people bind themselves together, demonstrated by the fact that Jesus “*adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana.*”

The prayer book goes on to note that marriage symbolizes the union of Christ and his church, an ancient idea with origins in our text from Isaiah, which says God rejoices over Israel as a bridegroom over a bride.

All four Gospels refer to Jesus as a bridegroom.

I’ve officiated at my share of weddings.

As I’m working with a couple in premarital counseling, one of my first concerns is to shift their focus from preparing for the wedding to preparing for the marriage.

A wedding is one day. Simple or extravagant, it’s over pretty quickly.

Marriage, though, is the commitment to change our very perspective on life, to change our primary focus from “ME” to “WE.”

That shift from ME to WE takes maturity, grace, and dedication.

I’m sure you all know someone who went through a wedding ceremony, but who never made the shift from ME to WE.

Some of you may have been married to someone whose attitude was still about whether they were getting what they wanted.

That’s not what God intends for the sacrament that is to mirror God’s love for humanity.

I want to show a short clip from a movie called *Shall We Dance?* This is the American version.

In it, Mrs. Clark suspects that her husband is having an affair.

She hires a private investigator, Mr. Devine, to tail her husband.

It turns out that Mr. Clark is NOT having an affair; he truly loves his wife.

But he’s bored with his life as an wills and estates attorney.

On a whim one evening, he starts taking ballroom dancing lessons, which means a lot of late evenings.

He never tells his wife what he’s doing; he thinks she’ll disapprove.

In his fear of that disapproval, he focuses on the ME instead of the WE.

The PI, of course, quickly finds out what Mr. Clark is doing, and tells Mrs. Clark.

As she’s paying the P.I. for his services, she asks him,

Mrs. Clark: *All of these promises that we make and we break. Why is it, do you think, that people get married?*

Mr. Devine: *Passion.*

Mrs. Clark: *No.*

Mr. Devine: *Interesting because I would have taken you for a romantic. Why then?*

Mrs. Clark: *Because we need a witness to our lives. There’s a billion people on the planet. I mean, what does any one life really mean? But in a marriage, you’re promising to care about everything: the good things, the bad things, the terrible things,*



[Click here for clip](#)

Today’s Collect and Scripture readings are at the end of the sermon text.

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*the mundane things. All of it, all the time, everyday.
You're saying your life will not go unnoticed because
I will notice it. Your life will not go unwitnessed because
I will be your witness. You can quote me on that, if you like.*

Mrs. Clark is a darned good theologian.

She has real insight as to the biblical, sacramental view of marriage

Isaiah describes how God delights in the beloved;

and because we are made in the image of God,

in marriage we are invited to delight in our chosen one as God does.

Like God, we make a covenant with another to notice them,

make their lives important, rejoice and celebrate who they are,

to be vulnerable with each other, to share ourselves.

When marriages get in trouble, it's almost always because at least one of the people stops doing those things, going from WE back to ME.

[In case any of you are wondering, Mr. & Mrs. Clark recommit to being a WE,

to not be afraid to be seen as they truly are, and delight in each other

by dancing together in the aisles of Saks 5th Ave. department store.]

Now, absolutely everything I've just said about marriage between people

can also be said about people and their relationship with not only God,

but the Church, the Body of Christ – except, maybe, dancing in Saks.

And, remember what I said at the beginning, about the prayer book,

which says marriage symbolizes the union of Christ and his church.

So, one of the primary purposes of being church – the Body of Christ –

is to witness, to rejoice, to celebrate the lives of other people

and to be vulnerable and to share ourselves with them.

Earlier this year, researchers at Brigham Young University claimed

that an increasing number of middle aged and older Americans are chronically isolated,

and are at a significantly increased risk for premature death.

They called this “Loneliness Epidemic” a major public health threat.¹

I can't think of a better antidote for isolation than the Body of Christ!

How? Well, you all pretty much sit in the same pew every week.

Find out each other's names. Notice each other, whether someone is missing.

Yes, I can try to keep track of all of you; I do my best.

But if 250 people are all noticing each other,

a much greater level of care and connection will be created.

That Christian love is what church is for.

The purpose of the Church is not to control people, imposing a bunch of rules

that, if followed, will make God accept us,

although that has been a strong temptation for the church over the millennia.

We see evidence of that in the First Letter to Timothy, which is getting to be about 2,000 years old.

The letter denounces pinched Puritanical strictness,

(you've heard H. L. Mencken's definition of Puritanism?

it's *the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.*²

There's nothing puritanical about this passage from Timothy!

¹ <https://www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/news/20170807/loneliness-epidemic-named-a-public-health-threat>

² H.L. Mencken, *A Mencken Chrestomathy: His Own Selection of His Choicest Writing*. Vintage, 1982, p. 624.

The letter echoes the joyful proclamation in Genesis 1:34
 that everything God created was not just good, but SUPREMELY good.
 This includes marriage, all foods, and everything God creates,
 receiving it all with an attitude of gratitude.

Our God is a God of such incredible abundance
 that we can't possibly exhaust the supply of goodness showered on us.
 Besides all of Creation, another sign of this abundance
 is Jesus' action at the wedding at Cana,
 where he provides the equivalent of 50-75 CASES of most excellent wine
 for a party that had already been going on for a good long while.

The sign almost didn't happen;
 Jesus' mom had to tell him to notice what was going on.
 At first, he distances himself from the groom's problem,
 and states that it wasn't time for him to start his public ministry.

Then his mother said the words I think she'd heard before.
 Imagine Mary as Gabriel stood before her with his startling request that she bear a child.
 She sat and pondered for a minute, and I think the Holy Spirit whispered in her heart:
Do whatever he tells you. And she, the handmaid of the Lord, did.

So she gave the same message from the Holy Spirit to the head waiter:
Do whatever he tells you. Only, this time it's God's choice whether to say yes.
 In the spirit of the day, Jesus went from ME to WE
 and the Reign of God burst into a broken, troubled situation with a gift of fabulous abundance.
 The head waiter rejoices, the disciples place their faith in Jesus,
 and the beginning of a new age of joyful, mutual blessing begins.

The point of the letter to Timothy is that it is the way of demons, not saints,
 – the way of the world, not God – to control each other, to set up rules that create scarcity and anxiety,
 to call it a sin to be in a relationship of support, joy, and love.

It's the way of demons when we focus on ME instead of WE.

The only rules of a WE Church are that we give to each other
 the mercy, grace, compassion, justice and love that God gives to us.
 Church is to be a place that is in marked contrast with our stingy culture of ME.
 The way of God is to open the storehouses and shower abundance,
 liberation, and all that is good on everyone; no one at that wedding at Cana
 was told they were unworthy to drink God's wedding wine,
 just as no one at the feeding of the 5,000 (which takes place in 4 chapters)
 was excluded from receiving God's living bread.

In Isaiah and in Jesus we see that the Church is like being married: bound together,
 we go from ME to WE, making things good, whole, and holy for the community,
 the community gathered here, but also for ALL of God's supremely good creation,
 showering food, kindness, and forgiveness,
 and even just by taking a walk of peace and getting to know a stranger,
 who then becomes a neighbor, and maybe becomes a friend.

A WE Church is a place where, in the name of God, we witness each other's lives:
 the good things, the bad things, the terrible things, the mundane things.

All of it, all the time, everyday. We promise, in the name of God,
 that a life will not go unnoticed because we will notice it.

A life will not go unwitnessed because we will be your witness.

A WE Church celebrates the tie that binds our lives together in Christian love.
 Let's be THAT Church.

COLLECT OF THE DAY

Lord God, source of every blessing, you showed forth your glory and led many to faith by the works of our Son, who brought gladness and salvation to his people. Transform us by the Spirit of his love, that we may find our life together in him Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord.

ISAIAH 62:1–4

For Zion's sake I won't keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I won't sit still until her righteousness shines out like a light, and her salvation blazes like a torch. Nations will see your righteousness, all kings your glory. You will be called by a new name, which the Lord's own mouth will determine. You will be a splendid garland in the Lord's hand, a royal turban in the palm of God's hand. You will no longer be called Abandoned, and your land will no longer be called Deserted. Instead, you will be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land, Married. Because the Lord delights in you, your land will be cared for once again."

PSALM 36:5-10

Your love, O LORD, reaches to the heavens, and your faithfulness to the clouds.

Your righteousness is like the strong mountains,

your justice like the great deep; you save both man and beast, O LORD.

How priceless is your love, O God! your people take refuge under the shadow of your wings.

They feast upon the abundance of your house; you give them drink from the river of your delights.

For with you is the well of life, and in your light we see light.

**Continue your loving-kindness to those who know you,
and your favor to those who are true of heart.**

TIMOTHY 4:1–6

The Spirit clearly says that in latter times some people will turn away from the faith. They will pay attention to spirits that deceive and to the teaching of demons. They will be controlled by the pretense of lying, and their own consciences will be seared. They will prohibit marriage and eating foods that God created—and he intended them to be accepted with thanksgiving by those who are faithful and have come to know the truth. Everything that has been created by God is good, and nothing that is received with thanksgiving should be rejected. These things are made holy by God's word and prayer. If you point these things out to the believers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus who has been trained by the words of faith and the good teaching that you've carefully followed.

JOHN 2:1–11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They don't have any wine."

Jesus replied, "Woman, what does that have to do with me? My time hasn't come yet."

His mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Nearby were six stone water jars used for the Jewish cleansing ritual, each able to hold about twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water," and they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some from them and take it to the headwaiter," and they did.

The headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine. He didn't know where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. The headwaiter called the groom and said, "Everyone serves the good wine first. They bring out the second-rate wine only when the guests are drinking freely. You kept the good wine until now." This was the first miraculous sign that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

SERMON HYMN: *Blest Be the Tie That Binds*

1 Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love;
the unity of heart and mind is like to that above.

2 Before our Father's throne we pour our ardent prayers;

5

our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, our comforts and our cares.

3 We share our mutual woes, our mutual burdens bear,
and often for each other flows the sympathizing tear.

4 From sorrow, toil, and pain, and sin we shall be free;
and perfect love and friendship reign through all eternity.

Text by John Fawcett, 1740-1817