

## **Sermon – Cathedral of the Incarnation The Wedding of Tricia and John**

If time permitted I would read to you the entire poem that is the Song of Solomon, from where the Hebrew Bible reading was taken today. It is one of the most sensuous poems in the bible and deserves to be aired at celebrations like this. The poem presents an ideal of new life and love. The words are as tightly interwoven as the two souls that they describe. The relationship is charged with erotic energy, and there is a distinct lack of coyness. The two lovers are young and optimistic and transitioning into a mature relationship. The relationship that is described is analogous to the relationship God and Jesus seeks with us – fully intertwined together. It's a relationship that we seek to emulate in marriage.

One of the things that puts a smile on my face is the knowledge that God, that radiant creative power, continually seeks this deep relationship with me and with you, despite our constant failure and weakness. God has continued to renew a covenant of love with us, wanting always for us to be in communion. God's covenant has at its core a relationship based on consistent love and forgiveness.

When we come to celebrate the sacred blessing that is sought in marriage, the word "Love" is often scattered about like the fragrant rose petals that can be ever so tenderly and lovingly laid before the bride. When we speak of love it often conjures up an image of romance from a novel or a movie, where the loving couple are swept up in passion and joyous bliss. Now there is nothing wrong with this image I guess but it doesn't convey the real essence of tangible love, the love that you and I might experience in our relationships.

Love is at the heart of our Christian faith even though we so often fail miserably to uphold and practice true love. Love is something that we need to work on each and every day, to keep it front and center in our daily encounters with all people. This extraordinary understanding of love was made secure for us in the bond between God and Jesus the Christ. Jesus offers us the same loving bond that is at the heart of, and foundation for, Tricia and John's marriage today.

Tricia and John we don't fully understand love in all its God-given dimensions. Love takes work and it takes commitment for two people to grow together with sacred intent and practice. God's love for you though is pure and all encompassing. At times you might feel like running away from God and maybe each other, you will probably disappoint and at times fail to love your fellow beings, but God will not disown you. God will in fact stand by you and love you with that consistent all encompassing love, encouraging you through the example of Jesus Christ and God's Holy Spirit, to grow into and practice a deeper kind of love.

However, entering into this full love can be quite scary and uncertain. To fully enter into love with another can make us feel exposed and vulnerable. This feeling of vulnerability can at times be like free falling. It can make us feel quite uncomfortable and therefore can be resisted. I think this is why we often hesitate to tell our beloved we are “falling” in love with them. Being vulnerable in a relationship can make us feel weak, but I think that it is in being vulnerable, revealing our wounds, and our most private feelings that true love buds and real love blossoms. Experience, and Jesus teaches that we can only be vulnerable in a safe place, in a place where we will not be judged or ridiculed, rather a place where we will be held, encouraged and nurtured. It is here that we will develop trust and a stronger bond forged in love.

God loves us unconditionally and that is such a wonderful gift. Jesus brings that pure love in the manifestation of his life. For Christians we are forever wedded to Jesus and God through baptism and through the holy eucharist, and wedded to each other in community. It is this community represented by all of us gathered today, that seeks to uphold you both, to nurture and support you as you seek a deeper relationship with each other. It is here also that Jesus will nourish you with his love and this Eucharistic meal.

Tricia and John have invited all of you here to this house of prayer today to be witnesses to their marriage. They have elected as baptized persons to marry here before God and their families and friends. May we also take to heart the marriage vows and at all times support each other.

Tricia and John, the vows you take today before God and your friends are sacred. Marriage is not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly as we said earlier, but reverently and deliberately. After you exchange your vows today we will pray for you. It is in the words of the prayers where I think you can draw real meaning for your common life. We will pray that you both be given wisdom to develop a common life, that you may offer strength to each other in times of need, to be a counselor in times of perplexity, and a comfort in sorrow and a companion in joy. We will pray that your wills and souls may be knit together with Christ through the spirit, and may grow in love. Importantly we will pray that you will be filled with grace to recognize when you hurt each other and that you will find grace to forgive each other as our God forgives us all.

Love is the joy of life in all its fullest dimensions. Love is shared companionship and the bond you will rely on in time of difficulty and sorrow. Share your pains and joys with each other daily. Grow to openly trust each other and to hold out fear. As light drives away darkness may love drive away fear.

*“Set me as the seal upon your heart, as the seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death. Passion fierce as the grave. It’s flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.”* This verse from the Song of Solomon caps what you heard earlier and reminds us of the power of love, love sealed within us by our God in creation.

So Tricia and John may your love for each other never fade or be quenched, just as God’s love for you is inextinguishable. May you both be blessed in union all the days of your lives.

Amen