

“have this woman to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God’s holy will; and I pledge to you my faithfulness.”

It’s the sweetest lie ever told, friends. And I’ve gotten to walk a surprising number of couples right through it these past years. Every time I tell them to take the others’ hands and repeat after me, my heart swells for the commitment and the love that each are walking into, and there’s always a little reminder of the joy given to me since I’ve made these vows. But there’s also a part of me that could chuckle.

For we all know, the newly weds included, that it will not be a simple life of having and holding, of loving and cherishing. Certainly when tempers run hot, when communication breaks down, choice words may fly, second guessing may enter the head, and the whole scene becomes one you’re glad is behind closed doors. Even on the days when things are in the better category, when you’re rich and healthy, on these days when there’s nothing much else to blame, the couple before me will still stumble and fail to love and cherish.

It’s inevitable. Every marriage is between two sinners, so sin will creep in and divide. But knowing this, understanding that this for worse situation, this

sickness in each of us, this poor disposition that comes over all of us, when they are aware of this challenge and they still commit to loving each other, it's sweet.

And it's God pleasing. God didn't scrap marriage once Adam and Eve crashed and burned as the first couple. When He saw them throwing each other under the bus, scheming together to sin and to hide, He didn't then decide that marriage was a bad idea. No, God has been present at every wedding, blessing every couple under the sun, whether they are aware of it or not. He's the one that provides a roof over a family's head, food on their table, kids around the house, and work to pay for it all. And not only the practical things, but He is the source of the affection husband and wife have for another, the compassion they stir up when the other suffers, the forgiveness when one trespasses against their better half.

He's there in the beginning of their life together, and by His grace alone He sees it through all their days. God loves marriage.

So when God takes on flesh, when Christ enters the picture, He comes to Cana to join the blessed occasion and partake in the feast. The creator sees with His own two formed eyes, witnessing the marriage of the unnamed couple, and He looks with so much favour upon them that He saves the celebration, changing water into wine. This gracious act saves the family from humiliation. Today no one

really blinks an eye if their favourite drink runs out at the wedding—they just get something different; but running out of wine would have cut the multi-day celebration dramatically short. But Jesus honours the whole shin-dig by making not only servable wine, but the best wine the headwaiter had tasted.

I wonder if Jesus, in His wisdom, looked out on the whole spectacle with a little chuckle as well. I laugh because the bride and groom are committing to something that they don't even know the half of yet, and we outsiders know they're in for a real surprise. Certainly Jesus could say the same thing with each wedding He attends.

He knows that each of them are stepping into something more wonderful than they'll ever comprehend. They're diving into more than a lifelong commitment, a relationship of trust and safety and fun, a place of vulnerability and forgiveness and future. They're entering into a picture of Christ and His Church.

One of the glories of marriage is that it gives us a glimpse of who God is. The husband is to lead the wife with perfect strength and wisdom and to serve her with unending compassion, even willing to lay his life down for her. In return, in faith even, the wife submits to the husband, trusting that he'll make good on his promise to care for her. With these vows made, they can care for each other,

embark upon adventures together, lavish in the joys of creation and simply revel in the company of the other.

Everything the husband ought to be, Christ is that and more to His bride, the Church. And likewise the bride ought to be for her husband, Christ.

We get plenty of this imagery throughout scripture. The relationship is painted with passion and wonder in Song of Solomon. Hosea prophecies about what should be, and about the bride's unfaithfulness and yet God's persistent faithfulness. The prophets as a whole call out in refrain for Israel to return to her groom, and Jesus in His parables, and John in His Revelation, they show that in spite of her unwillingness to submit and stay true to the husband, Christ the groom redeems her from her sin, clothes her in bridal splendor, and opens the door to the unending days of their future together.

Does Christ see a glimpse of this when the couple in Cana says "I will"? Is He excited to go to the cross, to endure "His time," "his hour" that He may cleanse His beloved, to seal the deal and say "I will, I have—it is finished" and make it forever? He even goes so far as to die to death, defeating death, that death would not part Him from His beloved bride.

For such a marriage, that we, the church, have such a groom, it's a reason to celebrate. It's why we gorge ourselves and dance the night away at every

wedding. Certainly because of the couple united that day, but also because of the reminder of what Christ has done for us. It's also why we celebrate communion, that preview of the heavenly banquet, as often as we do, that we would recall what has been done for us and anticipate the future that is securely awaiting us, that we would be sustained until the perfect unending wedding feast with our Lord and Redeemer and Groom.

It's easy to rejoice along Jesus, to have another glass of His perfect wine, when we're faced again with the brilliant realities of what has been done for us, when we're reminded of the perfect love we've been loved with.

It's not so easy when the groom seems to have forgotten His vows.

Just as when a husband forgets his promises, when he fails to see His bride's needs, dropping everything to care for her, when he seems absent in the relationship, it rightfully causes the bride to doubt his love for her. Did he mean it when he said "I will"? Will he always love and cherish me?

And in the scripture imagery, it is the bride who is unfaithful, untrue to God, and God comes to redeem her, but what about the times that Christ seems silent, absent, or even angry?

In this text from John, particularly in the interaction between Jesus and Mary, Luther sees a different side of God than we're comfortable chatting about.

Her request to Christ is a prayer made to God, for what else is chatting with Jesus than prayer. She takes to Him a concern, a need, a real request from everyday life. And the God who has redeemed us and promised to care for us, you'd think He'd be quick to respond. But Jesus asks her what it has to do with her.

How many times has this been your experience in praying? Not for money to fall from the sky, or even for your hair to stop falling out. How many times have you taken a request to God regarding something that is entirely within the realm of His will, of something that should be on His radar, and yet you get radio silence? When you pray for health, yours or another's, and you know God's heard you because Jesus promises that He will, and yet the diagnosis doesn't disappear; the reality simply persists. How many times have you prayed that sin would stop haunting you, that the temptations would cease, that your will would be strengthened, that you would have your raging conscience silenced, yet the devil and your sinful flesh seem to have a heyday and you're just beaten and bruised. Or your heart is tired of praying for a loved one to return to Jesus, to flee the sin that has entangled them, the unbelief that has taken root, and the unknown of how to chat with them about Jesus without losing them in your life forever is all you know now.

These prayers are not selfish. They're wrapped up in promises that God has made, not just to individuals in the bible but to the church and all believers.

You're right in taking these requests to God; the Church, you included, is right to remind Him of the promises He made to His bride.

Mary teaches us about this faith. Certainly Jesus transformed the water into wine, and pretty quickly at that, but she didn't know that would be the case. She had simply learned, through the miraculous birth of her Son, through the prophecies that she had pondered over the years, and certainly through seeing His love enacted, that her God is a kind and gracious God who cares. SO she opened her mouth and asked.

Even when Christ seemed silent, even when He seemed to act in the opposite way of her true wants and needs, even when He seemed to have shut her request down, she carries on with faith that her God hasn't changed. He is loving even when the world would see Him as angry. He is faithful even when the promises He has made to His beloved haven't yet passed. He is present even when it appears He is silent and distant. And in His time, He makes good on His character and word.

But the only guarantee we have that this will be the case throughout our lives and into eternity is His character and His Word. We're not promised a dozen

signs throughout our lives, like roses from a husband, to constantly renew our hope in Him and His love. We aren't given a timeline as to when He will finally act so that we only need to wait x number of days.

We have the signs He did in His time on earth, from the wine through the calming of storms and feeding the masses, to the healings, culminating in the cross and empty tomb; these reveal His glory to us that we would have faith. And we have the promise that He never changes so His power and His love carry on.

But faith that takes the groom's Word, and takes Him at His Word despite all we experience through life, faith like Mary's that carries on in hope, this can't be taught. It must be given. And the groom is faithful to give and shape such faith by the constant repetition of His promises, the recollection of His faithfulness. He says "I died for you to cleanse you, redeem you, and love you." This remains the same even when we don't understand His timing, when He seems to take longer than a faithful groom ought to when answering prayers and extending His care.

But hear His vows again; see His love enacted over and over again; come to where He, the faithful groom, is present for you, Church, His bride, where He clothes you in His righteousness, where He feeds you with His life. These acts aren't earth shattering spectacles—they too must be received through faith in His Word, but here He is acting for you. This is enough to carry you through til the day



when He answers, when you see Him as faithful. I can't say whether it will be here in time or there in the eternity He has opened for you, but I know this. He is good on His Word.

He loves you Church, you Christians, til death do you part. And He has defeated death, so that's not really a concern anymore now, is it? He simply loves you. Amen.