

The Reverend Jon Hauerwas - July 26, 2020 - Interdependence Colossians 3:12-17 and 1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Yesterday, I officiated at the wedding of Sarah Laferty and Nick Gronwoski. The setting was beautiful, in the backyard of a historic home on the Marblehead Peninsula. And there, with Lake Erie waves and a variety of watercraft competing for attention, the couple exchanged their vows.

Few occasions in life feel as meaningful as that moment when two people profess their lifelong commitment to one another. For Nick and Sarah, this included the traditional vows followed by their own, heartfelt declarations. The couple was sincere, funny, and hopeful. And throughout the service, each of them sobbed. For this occasion was so joyful that they were overwhelmed by emotion.

Many of you who are taking part in today's service once made similar vows of your own. And as we gather to worship together, I encourage you to remember as much as you can about that day. Where is the place where those promises were made? Why was that particular location chosen? Who was on your guest list, and who was unable to attend? Did a minister take part? Did you feel supported? Looking back, are there certain photos or conversations that really captured the mood, the

moment, or the emotion of that celebration? What are your fondest memories from that day?

I invite you to remember the vows spoken. At the center of each is the desire to know as one is fully known. To love as one is fully loved. To grow amid daily challenges and to weather inevitable hardships. To be married is to put one's ego to the side, to seek the best interest of the other, and to compromise. Marriage is a sacred covenant, established by God, which is to be honored by all.

It is an adventure punctuated with elation and disappointment. A path filled with companionship and longing. A journey traveled along lanes of togetherness and independence. Becoming married is at once entirely fulfilling and profoundly disorienting. Marriage changes you.

But, then again, every meaningful relationship changes you. In his first letter to the church in Corinth, Paul lifts himself up as a model of love by asking the worshiping community there “not how they might help *him*, but how he might help *them*.” (NIB, 952) For, in Paul's mind, “no matter how magnificent the

accomplishment, power, or action, when love is missing the exercise in question becomes vain, selfish, fruitless, and individualistic.” (NIB, 952)

Love, then, is far more encompassing than romantic interest. It is a bond shared between siblings, among friends, and across generations. Love is what happens when one holds the hand of a dying elder, and when one crouches low to listen to a small child’s story. Love is what emerges when those who once were strangers pass the peace in worship week in and week out. And love is the unwritten contract between two friends who agree to meet regularly no matter how busy their lives or how many of life’s distractions seem to get in the way.

Love is the birth of possibility, the reconciliation of conflict, the light at the end of the tunnel. Love is an eager longing and a simple word. A present reality and a memory of a former time. Love is embodied in us, and made known in the cross. Love will never end.

Still, despite love’s timeless nature, we continually learn new things about how to love more completely. In the present context of a global pandemic, love has surprised us. It now includes keeping our physical distance and wearing face masks

in an effort to safeguard our health and the health of our friends. And yet, just because we are wise to maintain physical distancing in an effort to limit the transmission of this new disease, we need not completely isolate ourselves from the outside world. For in an age of email, text messaging, video conferencing, telephones, and letters, we have ample opportunity to connect. To share. To build relationships. To extend words of comfort, sympathy, and hope. Now, as always, if we are willing to take the time and to make the effort, we will see firsthand how enduring love really is, even at such a time as this.

Today, as we expound on the nature of love, generally, and on the gift of marriage, specifically, I am reminded of the many widows and widowers that I have had the opportunity to speak with in the course of my ministry. Often, those who have suffered the death of a spouse tell me that they still seek to communicate, either aloud or silently, with the partner who is no longer at their side. They know that their loved one is not present or returning in this lifetime, but they still feel the need to connect. And they derive great comfort from a daily routine of speaking to the one with whom they shared so many of life's most treasured memories.

Humankind is utterly interdependent. Overwhelmingly, meaningful relationships top the list of those things that we need to feel fulfilled in this journey

of life. Stated simply, we need others to live well. And yesterday, as I witnessed the marriage of Nick and Sarah, I thought about how fortunate I am to share my life with the one who is also my best friend.

My wife and I do not always agree. And we don't always fully embody those characteristics about which Paul wrote so eloquently. But we are striving to do better. And we are daily seeking to demonstrate the meaning of love for two, special boys with whom we share our home. For one day, they may choose to put on a tux, and assume a new identity as someone's beloved for life. And if that day should come, we want them to see in us something worth emulating. May it be so and all thanks be to God. Amen.