

"Dearly Beloved" -- 1 John 4:11

The Wedding of
Ryan White & Jennifer Petrie

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho
Pastor Michael L. McCoy

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Grace, mercy and peace to you in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen.

Dearly Beloved,

You know, Ryan and Jennifer, we hear those very words on special occasions - like the baptism of a baby, or at the start of the rite of confirmation, or especially when an honorable man and a beautiful woman appear before the altar of the LORD God to be wed. There is a certain way and tone that those words are to be spoken. They are not said in the form of a question as if there were doubt, "Dearly Beloved?" No, that's not right. Also, the occasion is serious, so the words are not said in a flippant expression, "Dearly Beloved!" That sounds goofy. Likewise, this is neither the place nor the time for a maudlin, monotonous or sanctimonious utterance as in, "Dearly Beloved." No, that will never do.

In fact, although it is declaration, that is, a stating of what is true, it really goes beyond declaring to proclaiming. "Dearly Beloved." But in the minds of many, that Lutheran question surfaces, "What does this 'beloved' business mean?"

Well, on this joyous day, an old man will help us with the answer. He could not be here today as he is at another Wedding Feast. Instead, he wrote a letter and addressed it to those whom he considered to be his children. Jennifer and Ryan, in his first letter, the Apostle John wrote the words that will serve as the basis for your wedding sermon. Under the theme of "Dearly Beloved," please listen to 1 John 4:11 ...

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

Thus far the Word of the LORD our God.

Someone who is addressed as "beloved" is someone who is loved by another ... someone who is the recipient of another's love. You are loved and it is passive. You did not choose to be loved; you did not exercise your will to force another to love you; you did not make a decision that caused it to happen. Rather, you are loved.

For example, Jennifer and Ryan, you have many friends and neighbors here right now. They have cared enough about you to be here for you and to be a part of and to be witness to your wedding. You can't see them right now because of where you're seated, but they are out there. However, when

the Apostle wrote the word, "beloved," he was not writing about friendly love or neighborly love. What John scribed on papyrus or vellum was much deeper.

Listen once more, Ryan and Jennifer, you have many family members in this holy place. They love you and they rejoice in this day that the LORD has made. You can't see them right now because your chairs are facing the altar of the Almighty, but they are here. However, when the Apostle wrote the word, "beloved," he was not writing about family or brotherly love. What the holy man wrote about was much more profound.

Behold, both of you have your parents here this day and in them we are able to begin to understand the kind of love that John wrote about. You can't see your moms and dads right now, but, as they have been your entire lives, so now they are behind you, for in leading you, being with you, encouraging you, supporting you, they have been behind you ... just as they are at this very moment. You did not choose them to love you; neither did you force them. Rather, you are the recipients of their love and in various ways and at many times, their love has been sacrificial. This then, is the kind of love that the old Apostle wrote about ... sacrificial love ... a special love that recognizes a particular need and does absolutely whatever is necessary, regardless of the cost, to bring about what is the very best for the dearly beloved ... and the word is agape.

This sacrificial or agape love is the love that the LORD God Almighty had, and has, for a world headed for a date with destruction and has for every individual therein ... present company ... absolutely ... included. For the life of the world and for the salvation of each one here, God the Father gave His Son into death that you might have Life. "For God so agaped (so loved) the world that He gave His Only-Begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal Life" (John 3:16).

This self-giving, sacrificial caring is the love that the Son of God has for this fallen, entropy-filled world and for every person here - each one of us who, at this moment, is experiencing the unceasing, incremental, reality of the Second Law of Thermodynamics ... of respiratory, hematological, cardiac decay. Dearly beloved, behold Jesus, true God, begotten of His Father from eternity and true man, born of the Virgin Mary. He is crucified for you and for you He took Himself the penalty, weight, burden and price of every one of your transgressions of thought, word and deed. Every mark against you, that would keep you from an eternity in Paradise, is chalked up to Christ. On the cross behold the Sacrifice of God. He expires that you might have the breath of Life. His holy Blood is poured out for the remission of your sins and mine. His pump is pierced that He might create in you a clean heart. This is true love ... "not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:10).

God, in His kindness and benevolence, in His mercy and grace, has given this Word of Good News so that the Holy Spirit might work faith in everyone who hears this message of salvation. "For faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God ... that is, by the preaching of Christ" (Romans 10:17).

So, having come to this point, the Holy Spirit caused John to write these words, "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." That sacrificial love is used three times in that one verse, or in other words: "Agaped ones, if God so agaped us, we also ought to agape one another."

Ryan and Jennifer, if God has loved you with this type of love, then you, who are recipients of such

sacrificial love, ought to love one another in like fashion. What does this mean? As husband and wife, you are to serve one another - being willing to do whatever is needed for the welfare and benefit of one to the other. Ryan, your vocation as husband, is to be the same as the service that Christ has for His dearly beloved Church. In order for His Church to be blessed and have that which is good, right and salutary, Jesus was willing, and indeed did, sacrifice Himself for His Bride, the Church. That will now be your call ... your vocation as Jennifer's husband. Serve and uplift, guide and protect, even if it costs you your life.

Jennifer, your vocation as wife, is to be the same as the service that the Church enjoys with her Lord Jesus. Expect every good thing from your husband and serve him just as the Bride of Christ does from, with and for the Bridegroom of the Church. That will now be your call ... your vocation as Ryan's wife. Serve and edify, regard and follow, even for as many days as the LORD permits the two of you to walk together in this life.

During the time that you have together, you will not be the perfect wife, Jennifer; and you will not be the perfect husband, Ryan. Though you are beloved children of God and declared perfect in Christ; you are still, by nature, sinful human beings. Though you are heirs of heaven; there will be days ... in fact, every day ... when there will be dark thoughts, selfish words and even ungodly actions. In the midst of all that please remember that Christ has died to cover them all, has risen from the dead to declare His peace unto you and especially, particularly announces to you the forgiveness of all your sins. And dearly "beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" - that is, you two ought to love one another by announcing God's forgiveness to one another.

This is where you are to take the lead, Ryan, - to confess your sins to Jennifer and to hear her announce God's forgiveness to you; and then you, Jennifer, follow your husband's lead in these matters. Ryan, please escort your bride to the Divine Services and to the Table of the Lord's Holy Supper. Both of you are encouraged to be in the Word of God each day ... and by way of suggestion, perhaps you ought to consider the reading of the Song of Solomon during your honeymoon.

"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Please note this, that those who have been brought to an understanding of the sacrificial love of God in Christ are now engaged in a charge to serve. Certainly that means that a Christian husband and wife "ought to love one another" as God has loved them; but it extends beyond that because "one another" includes others ... includes anyone ... includes everyone.

So, there is one final application of this text to be made during this sermon. You see, dearly beloved, these two people seated up here already understood, not only what this Bible verse means, but also how it is to be applied. They know of and understand God's love for them, and when they met with me to make plans for this Divine Service, they asked me to have a sermon where would hear the Good News of God's love for you ... that you might hear and know and understand the Gospel. Though not an exact quote of what they said, the following expresses the intent of what Ryan and Jennifer wanted included in this sermon.

"Pastor, in our wedding sermon, please tell all our friends and neighbors about God the Father's great love in sending His Son into this world to be our and their Redeemer. Please have a sermon that lets our co-workers and colleagues hear about the forgiveness that Jesus achieved on the cross when He offered Himself on behalf of and in place of each one ... all in order that we all might be heirs of eternal life. Tell all of our family members that the LORD God cares about you so much that,

because there was that first Easter morning when Christ rose again from the dead, there will be a great reunion of the Family of God in heaven. Oh, and especially tell our moms and dads about the gracious, caring and sacrificial love of God in our Savior Jesus that is both theirs and ours. Tell everyone what He has done."

Well then, so be it. Listen to the Word of the LORD once more: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another." Therefore, please hear this gracious Gospel of the LORD God Almighty. Forgiveness, eternal life and salvation are yours in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.