

# SAVING MARRIAGE

## What God has joined together let no man tear asunder—Mt 19:6

The wedding industry is nearly a 74 billion-dollar industry in the United States and it has come to a crashing standstill due to Covid-19. Since our church runs a wedding venue business, we too have been hurt by this disruption. But we as Christians might also be blessed by it. As in all great trials, so with coronavirus, the destruction of non-essential things can lead us to the one essential thing. In these quarantine days, weddings aren't about great destinations, because you can't travel. They don't have great numbers, because numbers are restricted. They aren't great parties, because partying is difficult six feet apart, with masks. But now that the wedding has been stripped of its pretensions, its true significance might re-emerge. This is good news not just for couples and for anyone trying to live a joyful life.

Because we believe that a wedding, at heart, is a holy sacrament of the church, pointing to the movement of God in our lives. And as in all sacraments, the outward signs of it—dresses and cakes, rings and crowns (even brides and grooms!)- are only reflections of a powerful inward grace that God wishes to work in the couple, in their families and in all of us; namely to join together all the faithful with each other and with God.

“What God has joined together let no man tear asunder,” Jesus pronounces in today's reading. These words are commonly taken to be an admonition against divorce. But as always, when the Son of God talks his words not only have plain meaning, but penetrate to the very depths of existence. When our Lord said, “What God has joined together let no man tear asunder....” Let us not forget that God joined many things together in his creation, before he joined man and woman. He joined the land and water, the night and the day, the earth and the solar system in perfect harmony. At the climax of his great work, he joined the human body and soul to make each of us unique “temples of the Holy Spirit” as Paul puts it in today's epistle, fit for marriage to a king.

So you might say that God is the great matchmaker, which is exactly what God is in the Armenian language. Our word for God, Աստուծոյ/Asdvadz, likely comes from the word յաւանդել/hastel to join, to build. God is the great joiner, the great builder, and is still building up his people today. This happens through marriage, but not just there. God uses so many occasions of our life, great and small, happy and sad to help us realize that it is his plan to build something very special of us. That our lives are not our own, but if offered in service to God and others, he can form and build us into beautiful temples for His Holy Spirit, where He might dwell forever.

In other words, our lives, our marriages, our families are sacred ground, upon which God wishes to build his temple. So let's not be anxious about the outward trappings of life—banquets and bridal parties—and sacrificing our lives to pay for them. Instead, let us give our lives for God and neighbor and the Lord will provide. There is a beautiful old story about how the spot was chosen to build God's temple in Jerusalem that gets to the heart of sacred marriage between people and with God. As the story goes, two brothers worked a common field and mill, and every week they split the harvest of grain. One was single and one had a big family. The single brother worried how his brother could feed all those mouths in his big family, so secretly at night he would sneak grain from his own granary and add it into his brother's. The other brother with the large family worried that his single brother would have no one to take care of him in old age. So he snuck grain back into his brother's barn at night. When the brothers found out what each was up to, they embraced. The temple was built there, because it was a place of self-giving love, holy ground, and a fitting place for God to dwell.

May our lives, whether married or single, be rooted in this unselfish love greater than ourselves. May we not spend our lives pining for more, bigger and better, but instead be grateful for the great gifts we have been given. And in all of our relationships, with God and our loved ones, may we always work to sneak grain from our storehouse and offer it up for others. For in this way, God builds sacred lives, sacred marriages and families in which He chooses to dwell. And as Jesus himself today reminds us “What God has joined together--no one can tear asunder” now and always; amen.