

The Witness of Marriage

A gospel reflection from Brian Wigger, Pastoral Associate

A husband and wife who had been married quite a number of years were having a quick breakfast. As they were cleaning up the wife said to her husband, "I bet you don't remember what today is". Put off and a bit insulted he said, "Of course, honey, I remember." He then gathered up his things quickly and left for work. About ten o'clock, a dozen red roses arrived at the house. At noon a box of the wife's favorite chocolates was delivered. That was followed at three o'clock by a new dress from one of her favorite boutiques. The woman was very excited and could not wait for her husband to come home. When he entered, she ran up to him, gave him a hug and said, "Thank you so much! First the roses, then the chocolates, then the dress! I never had a better Groundhog's Day!"

Recently I was asked to do a reading at the wedding of a wonderful couple. As I was in my pew before the wedding started, I could not help from thinking about how my friends who are about to get married, seem to me to be the perfect example of what a married couple should be. They know how a wedding is different than a marriage. They seem to know that a wedding is an intense celebration that takes months to plan. A marriage is a commitment of faithfulness that takes years to fulfill. A wedding is about the music, the dress, the gifts, the parties. A marriage is about compromise, forgiveness, listening, and remembering your anniversary. A wedding is a challenge but one that most people can pull off. A marriage is the difficult work of a lifetime.

This is why Jesus' words are so important in our Gospel this weekend. He tells his disciples that from the beginning of creation God had a plan and a purpose for marriage. That purpose was not simply for the mutual love of a man and woman. It was not simply to create a home where children could thrive. Marriage was meant to be a witness, a witness to others.

This is another way that a wedding differs from a marriage: A wedding is for the couple. A marriage is for others. The very fact that marriage is difficult increases its power as a witness. When any of us see a couple who year after year work together, changing and adapting, patiently listening to and respecting one another, that is a witness to us that we might be capable of changing and adapting. Their marriage calls us to recognize the importance of others in our lives and strengthen our own relationships with them. When we see a couple who time and again forgive one another so that they can put the past behind them and begin to love in a new way, that is a witness to us that we, too, can forgive and keep some our relationships alive. We believe in the power of that witness. Marriage is difficult. But precisely because it is difficult, it is able to be a witness to others of faithfulness, patience, and forgiveness.

This is why another aspect of the gospel is most important. Jesus says, "Let no one separate what God has joined." We believe that God has joined a man and a woman in marriage.

Therefore, the man and the woman are not alone. The God who has joined them is with them to give them the strength to let their love continue.

Now, of course, not all marriages do continue. When they fail, none of us should make any judgments. It is only the people within the marriage who understand what is possible and what is not. But when marriages do continue, when the vows are lived out over a lifetime, that relationship becomes a witness to everyone else.

Now there clearly are no husbands and wives who are perfect witnesses. You might be able to pull off a perfect wedding. But pulling off a perfect marriage is next to impossible. There are always flaws and mistakes, ways in which the couple needs to adjust and start over again. But this is what is to be expected. This is why marriage can be such a strong witness to the world. This is why God has promised to be with husbands and wives all the days of their lives