

The Wedding of John DeWorken and Sunnie Harmon
May 24, 2014, 6:00pm
Main Street UMC, Greenwood, SC
Ruth 1:16-18, John 15:9-17
Pastor Phil Thrailkill

It's been said by some who know them well that they loved the intrigue of politics and back-room negotiations before they loved each other, that they were arm-in-arm as comrades long before they faced each other to acknowledge something rich and lively had grown between them. Restraint and self-control are not common in this days of quick relationships and speed-dating; everything's a rush, but here the path was slower and more indirect, even a bit old-fashioned as when relationships were built through correspondence over time. It was as vocational and it was primal, as much about forging intellectual compatibility as admitting attraction and confessing to chemistry.

Now these patterns were in place because the lovely Sunnie was the cool John's junior partner long before he felt his heart flutter while gazing upon the fair maiden with her blond locks, long legs, and wicked smile. How many are the times he reasoned with himself, "There are many fine women in the world. Why ruin a good business relationship?" He had the sense to hire her before he had the good sense to woo her.

I'm also told that to behold one of their verbal fights over clients or strategies, especially ones in the car as they rip back and forth to Greenville, is a thing of rare intensity, but now that they are to be married, their make-ups and make-outs can be just as fiery. So this evening I offer John a new pick-up line, "Hey, baby," he might say as they bound up the steps of the Capital, "Let's have a fight."

And she will flash back, "Why wait? Let's start now. And John, did you remember take your vitamins and drink your protein shake this morning?"

And that is one of the delights of marriage. To develop a subtle language all your own, to send signals and flirtations none understand except the two of you. In the middle of a sermon I can make Lori blush with wink, and she- with a special glance- can erase my train of thought. Such is the power of two lives deeply synchronized as celebrated in our SC official dance, *the shag*, and when it's done right, you can't tell who's leading. Two become one in so many ways. And in years to come as they age, and as John gets older faster, many in the halls of power will wonder at his savvy, "If he could win her, he may be smarter than he appears. I should hire him as my lobbyist." Sunnie, you've done well, and John, you've done better!"

But alas, there's a dark side to this political romance. I'm told by several sources that a gaggle of matronly legislators and lobbyists have banded together under the cover of public safety- something about falling from heights without a harness- to limit the inches of heel a lobbyist may sport. Behind closed doors it's known as the *Sunnie Harmon Unfair Advantage Act Of 2014*, and it is- at this point- without male co-sponsors!

We are here this evening for a service of Christian worship that praises God for the genius of making us male and female and of outfitting us for delightful compatibility and the possibility of fertility with its gift of children for those who are not yet too old. Two is the number that cures a deep loneliness, and male and female is the creation hardware that alone make it possible. Two who are different in gender is the code written deep into creation. On the base of that given reality, which some term *natural law* because it is so universally visible, arise all the stories and songs of romance that fill creation with music and rhythm and new life. Social experiments come and go, but this will endure, as both Scripture and the introductory paragraph of our liturgy make clear, "The covenant of marriage was established by God, who made us male and female for each other." You may as well try to redefine gravity. At every such wedding, there are mysteries too deep for words as each new couple enters a reality as old as Eden and as fresh and inviting as their most recent embrace. For at least a shining moment, we are all innocent again.

So we gather with processions, with ladies and gents in attendance, with hymns and songs and all our finery, here to listen as three sets of interlocking vows are performed before witness. Before our eyes is the work of God as a new marriage and home are formed, and what God has joined, let no one weaken or destroy lest you make God your enemy, as Jesus said in an ancient curse formula. Marriage is God's masterpiece and the deep stability of any humane society; to deface it with infidelity or mock it with substitutes or imitations is a crime indeed. All, even the single, have a stake in every marriage which is a richly social and not just an intimately personal good. So we first ask about intentions, Are you baptized, and why are you here? I ask, "Will you?" and then lay out the terms. And when each has said "I will," we know their intent is to marry and bestow upon one another the noble titles of *husband* and *wife* until one dies and the marriage ended. A bit later they turn to face each other, join hands and take the English wedding vows which go back to the elevated solemnity of Thomas Cranmer and *The Book of Common Prayer*. It's rhythmic phrases lay out the loyalties and uncertain circumstances of their life as a couple in the fellowship of the church, "... to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health," and then the wonderful last couplet, "to love and to cherish" before we are again reminded that marriage is for this world and not the next, "under we are parted by death," to which the signature and integrity

of each is affixed with the binding phrase, “This is my solemn vow.” A legal contract, a holy covenant, and a graced commitment to live our these promises.

Sunnie and John have now told us why they are here and in just a moment how they intend to live as a blessed pair, but even after the wedding vows a question remains, “How will they announce their new status to the world without a word? and that is what the rings and their particular vows are about. A simple band of gold on the left ring finger, says *I am taken, I belong to someone, and we intend to keep our vows*. Like the water of baptism and bread and wine of the Lord’s table, the ring is sacramental, *an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace* as the service says quoting Augustine, and so they pledge to one another, “I give you ring as a sign of my vow, and with all that I am and all that I have, I honor you,” to which is added the Triune name of God, “...in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” I secretly wish there was a way to bring back Cranmer’s elegant phrasing at this point, “With this ring/ I thee wed, with my body/ I thee worship, and with all my worldly goods/ I thee endow.”

And this, dearly beloved, after a final prayer and blessing, is all the church can offer in public. Sonny and John, tell us why are you here? “We are here as Christians to marry according to the customs of our faith.” And how will you live? “As husband and wife all our days until one lays the other in the sod to await the resurrection of the dead.” And what is the public sign of your union? “Two bands of gold given and received.” Only when these three sets of promises are consummated is their union sealed in flesh, and of that we have a preview in their kiss at the end of the service, which though never written officially into the church’s liturgy has endured as a folk custom to the delight of all.

My dear students, we are now in the midst of your Christian wedding, and having attended the Pastor Phil Academy of Pre-Marital Education, and having received high marks for your work, and having procured a state license and the approval of your family and friends, and having told us why you are here, let us now proceed to the wedding and ring vows that you may soon begin your new life as husband and wife, remembering always the call of our Lord to love one another and keep all his commands. What an honor to be here, and may your marriage drive you deep into the presence of Jesus and the world he so dearly loves. You are now each other’s closest companion, so love your neighbor as you love yourself. And may your marriage point others to God’s good designs. And may your grandchildren, should God grant them, say to their friends one day, “I want someone to love me just as Grandma Sunnie and Poppa John did.” So shall your life have generational effects and this holy vision of Christian marriage continue until the end.
