

The Wedding Of Claire Johnson and Allen Brown
October 19, 2013, 5:30pm,
Main Street UMC, Greenwood, SC, Pastor Phil Thrailkill

What a great day! What a handsome couple! What a promising future! A marriage between a young man and a young woman, both with roots in the faith and with a promise to me that finding a church in D.C. is a priority. Healthy. Well-educated. Employed with health insurance. Their families intact. They have a running start on life and all its goodies, and with that privilege a high obligation to serve and reach back a hand to help others, as you will soon hear in our Intercessory Prayer which asks God to “Enable them to grow in love and peace with you and with one another all their days,” then this neglected line, “*that they may reach out in concern and service to the world...*”

Marriage is personal, intimately so, but never merely private and turned in on itself. If marriage is to thrive, it must find a shared mission beyond itself and a way to generate more love than the two can consume. That Allen’s brother Leland and his wife have started a hot-dog ministry to the homeless in the ghettos of Charleston is an example of how the love that grows between a couple who know God can overflow in abundance to bless the world around them. Isolated marriages with no social conscience turn to dry rot, but those who let God’s love flow to and through them are full of strength and resilience. Today we celebrate the wisdom of God in making us equally human in worth and delightfully different in gender so that the mystery of complementarity may dance through the whole of life, and for a few minutes this evening we’re back in Eden with all its delicious possibilities for love and pleasure and life and innocence in God’s good garden.

But here, it seems, I have a bigger stake than usual because of some shared history. The Blanchett family moved to Cheraw for a textile job with Burlington and stayed almost five years. I remember hearing the popular girls at school gossiping with one another, “There’s a new girl in town. Her name’s Kathy. She has really pretty hair. Should we let her in our group?” The vote was unanimous for inclusion. I had not seen Kathy’s mother since 1969 but recognized her immediately at the rehearsal party last night. And when with a hug she said, “You know your dad was our family doctor,” I was flooded with emotion. I love *small world* stories; they remind me in pointed ways that we are connected and that life often comes full circle. Dr. Jim cared for their health, and now Pastor Phil cares for a granddaughter and her beau; it’s a good and holy tradition of service.

By God’s providence Allen and Claire found each other (and re-found each other I ‘m told after an eight month separation) to say *I don’t want to live without you*, and then for Allen to propose on one knee atop the huge Federal building he helps manage was the turning point. The man has some style, even a bit of chivalry. A true South Carolinian!

I'm told by my sources high in government that on that very day a Secret Service helicopter was circling the Mall observing all movements through high-tech binoculars. "Hey! What's that guy doing on top of the FEMA building? I don't see any suspicious packages, and there a cute little blond with him. Do you think they're going to jump? Quick. Get the D.C. Police up there. No, wait a minute. He's on one knee opening a little black box. I see a glint in the sunlight. It's a diamond. He's proposing. And look at her; she's jumping up and down. One of her high heels just fell off. I think she said Yes!" So when you hear that a new reg is being enforced and that Claire and Allen's was the last proposal in such high places, you know where it started! I think he ought to re-propose to her once a year, each time on top of a different building. All in favor, please raise your right hand! Done, by public vote! Take a picture each year. It will make a great coffee table book: *Fifty Proposals To One Woman: A Story Of High Adventure!*

Some of the great love stories and the songs that celebrate them have yet to be written. Why can't this be one of them? Why not have a life and love to inspire your children and grandchildren? At every wedding I attended in Cheraw, and sometimes that was two a Saturday during peak season, my parents snuggled up to one another and under their breaths retook their wedding vows with a smile as I watched in awe. Isn't that what the vows promise? *To love and to cherish until we are parted by death.* So use every wedding to renew your vows and remember how full of hope and love you were this special day. Don't let love wither and die under the burdens and distractions of life. Push aside the cold ashes of indifference and blow the coals back into a flame of holy passion. It is a great sin to forget your sacred vows to God and the one to whom you made such impossible promises. Sure marriages fail in a sin-filled world of disposable commitments, and some divorces are necessary, but not as many as crumble all around us, and today we all pledge that our prayers and encouragements for Claire and Allen will not end with tonight's festivities. I am their marriage coach; the pastor of their new church will be a close-at-hand resource, and the young-marrieds Sunday School class they soon will join will offer a new set of friends who share their faith and will be there if children come. Such friends will halve their sorrows and double their joys. How else are they to survive the temptations and pressures of the great and wicked city of Washington where lust and greed and power and ambition and excess threaten the tender fidelities and tough virtues that build strong marriages? Can something as unfashionable as Sunday morning at church and something old-fashioned as Sunday School make the difference? You bet it can. It is a counter-weight in an unbalanced world. Make Sundays an appointment in your calendar.

Allen and Claire, we are happy to be here. We will pray that you walk with Christ and grow in mature and holy love all your days. You today are a sign of hope in a broken world. You leave this building with new and honorable titles, *husband* and *wife*. None are higher. Live into their heights and depths, and God will guard you both. Amen.
