A Brief Theology of Marriage

Jean Larson Bishop’s Convocation 9/26/14

*The heart of marriage is a promise. On the face of it it’s a crazy promise. Two people who have only a partial understanding of one another stand up and make a bizarre statement that they’re going to cherish and care for one another for a lifetime….To many persons this seems like a mad and risky thing to do. Yet I would suggest that the madness is the romance. Without the risk there is no beauty or strength or goodness.*

*(****Guess who*** *said it?)…. Joseph Sittler*

Sittler! In EVERY wedding homily – gets at the warm beating heart of a Lutheran theology of marriage: its deep humanity! Its realism: mad and risky, yet beautiful and strong and good.

Of course, that’s not all. But our usual Lutheran “go-to” for the *theo-*logical depth is of limited use.

Bible – “source and norm” – reflects its various cultures on marriage:

Levirate -- dead husband’s brother obligated to marry widow

Polygamous – great heroes of faith! Even in NT bishops must be

“husband of one wife” – *wife of one husband?*

NT norm for the greatest heroes: celibacy

*Any “therefore” from this? Marriage in Bible takes a variety of forms.*

More helpful when we go not to forms of marriage but to creation itself:

Gen 1: 26 *Let us create adam in our own image…male & female:*

*VERY GOOD!* What does this mean?

Made to be in community, as God is

Sex and babies and t-bones are good

Gen 2:18 *It is not good for the human --adam* to be alone….I will

make a helper as *adam’s* partner. (like/unlike; mirror)

--marriage, then, is one solution – not the only—no mandate

Friendship, church community, facebook!

Lutheran theology of marriage in all its richness in wedding liturgy, as in Sittler quote:

1. **Affirmation of joy**: prayer of the day – rooted in Christ’s presence

*As you gladdened the wedding at Cana …*

Big party of incarnational holiness with hint of eternal feast to come

Also sneak preview in (new-in-ELW) pastoral introduction

1. **Affirmation of risk – seriousness – sin and redemption:**
   1. ELW: Declaration of intention up front (*forsaking all others*…)
   2. LBW: (option for pastoral “introduction” in ELW) Informed consent clause

*The Lord God in goodness…but because of sin….but God continues to bless* (couples hate sin part!)

* 1. Vows – *in sickness and in health...*

1. **Participation in God’s covenant** (one way to participate, not only)
   1. Nuptial blessing – much expanded in ELW

Foretaste of the feast! Sign of the kingdom! (for mystics among us) Marriage *an image of the covenant…. vision of your kingdom on earth*

Marriage as witness to the world of God’s love

* 1. Luther: marriage as *little church within the church*-- practice forgiveness

OR (Patricia Beatty Jung) practice loving enemy (for realists among us)

3 questions for our work together today:

1. ***“As followers of Christ, what does it mean to be married, especially in a culture [that doesn’t take it seriously]?”***

(CC Blog, 7/31/12, Dennis Sanders)

1. Dan Spencer (parishioner, UM prof, PhD in theo ethics) and Anglican Theo Review:

Affirming that heterosexual marriage is normative in scripture (a given)—is it necessarily *exclusive* (Dan) or *exhaustive* (ATR)?

(given plurality of cultural forms in scripture and plurality of human sexual orientations)

***Is “normative” exclusive of GLBT couples or not?***

1. Marriage is linked with Christ’s mission in the world – self-giving love of Christ – Our two brothers in Christ in Lewistown – we are not Catholics, but how might this question apply to the ELCA: ***There is only so much inhumanity that a church can be seen to represent before its own members lose faith in it.***

(“Can the Church Survive in America?” The Dish blog)

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