

## Trinity 4 Grace and Romance

5 July 2020 Week 1 St George's

May I speak in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit

**Introduction** Normally, I speak to the whole congregation without distinction. Today I want to speak about marriage and about grace. This sermon is being given on the 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary! Not our choice of passages – they are as given by the Lectionary and I celebrate!

✠ **PSALM 45.10-17** <sup>10</sup> *Listen, daughter, and pay careful attention: Forget your people and your father's house. <sup>11</sup> Let the king be **enthralled** by your beauty; **honour** him, for he is your lord. <sup>12</sup> ..... <sup>13</sup> **All glorious is the princess** within her chamber; her gown is interwoven with gold. <sup>14</sup> In embroidered garments she is led to the king; ..... <sup>15</sup> **Led in with joy and gladness**, they enter the palace of the king. ....*

✦ **I love the words used:** *Listen v10. Enthralled v11 Honour v11 All glorious v13 Joy and gladness v15.* The context is probably that of a bride coming to the king and it is written in a context where the bride left her people and went to the husband's people. Interestingly in Genesis it is the man who is to leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife. In a nomadic culture where the son travelled with his parent's it cannot be a literal leaving. I believe one of the key ways to a blessed marriage is for the son to leave his mother and father psychologically, and that his wife is number one – above and beyond all others.

### Some lessons on marriage from this passage:

1. Listen: this is a mutual process. In fact, we men are not nearly as good at this normally. In general we will tend to try to fix things for our spouse rather than take the time to listen. Here the word is addressed to the woman ... and I think it is saying, *pay attention my daughter, this is going to mean a leaving for you, don't let your mind dwell on what you have left and focus on what is ahead.* Comparisons with the past are dangerous.

In my marriage, my wife did, like Ruth the ancestor of David, leave her family, country and church tradition to be with me. Even after 40 years, I feel a deep sense of appreciation that she was willing to do this. But as time has gone on I have learned her first language and entered into more of her story and I feel deeply thankful.

2. Notice the other words ... I would say be **enthralled** with each other to the very end. This takes focus – I don't feel it takes work ... well it has never felt like that, but it does take time and commitment ... the old English word being **troth**. It takes **honour** of the other ... I will be enthralled with my wife, I will not laugh at her or criticise her in front of others, I will seek to lift her up, I will always have a sense of the glorious ... the presence of God in our relationship ... **Bidden or not bidden God is present** ... and he is to be present as much in the bedroom as at the dining table, or wherever ... and **joy and gladness** is the frequent Biblical couplet of expectation of good relationships.

In these months of cloistering I have been involved in re-arranging planned wedding blessings with Wedding Planners and it has been special to be in contact with these couples whose weddings are being postponed due to the present situation. I love doing weddings and I love marriage! I also love some of the Jewish wedding blessings and prayers. Listen to these:

### Jewish Wedding blessing and prayers

**5/7** *Let the loving couple be very happy, just as You made Your creation happy in the garden of Eden, so long ago. You are blessed, Lord, who makes the bridegroom and the bride happy.*



**6/7** *You are blessed, Lord our G-d, the sovereign of the world, who created joy and celebration, bridegroom and bride, rejoicing, jubilation, pleasure and delight, love and brotherhood, peace and friendship. May there soon be heard, Lord our G-d, ... the sound of joy and the sound of celebration, the voice of a bridegroom and the voice of a bride, the happy shouting of bridegrooms from their weddings and of young men from their feasts of song. You are blessed, Lord, who makes the bridegroom and the bride rejoice together.*

#### ✘ OLD TESTAMENT READING

Then we have in our Old Testament reading in Genesis 24:58-67 a marvellously romantic story of Rebekah and Isaac. An arranged marriage ... but how romantic! When we served in a mainly Indian church in the Gulf by far the majority of our congregation were arranged marriages ... and as some told their stories they talked about the romance. In Bible marriage there is never forced marriage ... Rebekah was asked .. *will you go with this man.* That is true in the arranged marriages we worked with. I would say that so called love matches are no more or less successful than arranged marriages. It is all to do with what the couple make out of it. I believe any marriage can work if the couple are both determined to make it work ... no marriage can work if only one member of the couple has this attitude. Any form of abuse is to my mind unfaithfulness and shows that one member does not have the willingness to truly celebrate marriage. The story finishes: ***So she became his wife, and he loved her; and Isaac was comforted after his mother's death.*** Am a man I would say there is no underestimating the power of a woman you love to give comfort.

The New Testament of Romans 7:15-25 reading is not about marriage ... but I want to apply it to marriage. Paul talks about failure. ***15 I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.*** All marriages are flawed because we are flawed. The number of times I have had to say sorry – often due to inadvertent mistakes and often due to carelessness – but sometimes simply deliberately wanting my own way! There have often been things I regretted and I could easily echo Paul. I recognise the place of sin, of the centrality of the 'I', of selfishness and self-centredness. Paul says in v18: ***For I have the desire to do what is good*** ... Yes Paul, so do I but ... but ... but! I recognise Paul's cry ... and echo it. ***22 For in my inner being I delight in God's law;*** ***23 but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me.*** There are times when I feel like Paul ***24 What a wretched man I am!*** ... but then comes the marvel of the Gospel and the thing that should make Christian marriages different: ***25 Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!*** There can always be hope!

#### ✘ GOSPEL

And that brings us to The Gospel, Matthew 11:19, 28-38. It is a word of grace however we are feeling. We have a Christ who is willing to be our friends, whatever we are like: ***19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, "Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners."***

If we have mucked it up, if we have got it wrong, if we have failed, he comes to us and says: ***28 'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'*** What a relief! In this is joy and gladness! Come to Jesus .. and he will be to you what you need.

**May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight,  
O Lord our Rock and our redeemer.**

