

The theme of my sermon is love. I have a number of groups of people in mind as I give it. I think first of those who are contemplating marriage. I hope that this sermon will help you to see that love is a promise, primarily, not a feeling. I hope this sermon will cause you to think about the marriage vows you plan to take one day. Secondly, this sermon is for those of you who are experiencing problems in your marriage. Maybe you are going through rough times financially. Maybe you are going through a time of grief and sorrow that is straining your marriage. Maybe you just feel that you are no longer in love. This sermon is for you. Thirdly, this sermon is for those of you who are now happily married, <sup>or widowed having been happily married,</sup> Your marriage has weathered many storms. <sup>have tried</sup> You ~~are trying~~ hard to keep your promises. Maybe you have been divorced and remarried. You've learned from past mistakes and you are trying hard to be all that you can be as a husband or wife. Finally, this sermon is for those who are single or unmarried. You may not have a husband or wife but all of us are called as Christians to love one another. We might not like the people we live with or work with but as Christians we are to love them. The love that Paul talks about in our Scripture lesson applies to all Christians, not just to married couples.

I have to confess at this point that my sermon is not original. I once heard another minister give this sermon. His name is Tom Troeger, <sup>Troeger</sup> ~~who is~~ a Presbyterian minister. He originally gave this sermon at a wedding. I do not repeat it word for word, ~~though, because I have neither a tape or a written copy of it.~~ I have reconstructed it from memory adding my own insights and observations. But the idea of the sermon is basically his. Where the sermon is useful and speaks to you I want Tom Troeger to have the credit. And where it is hard to understand or obscure, I will take the blame for that.

In his sermon Tom mentioned that he knew of a couple who celebrated their wedding anniversary each year in a unique way. Each year the wife puts on her wedding gown and the man gets into his wedding tux and pants, cummerbund and all, and they have someone take a picture of them in their living room. Now I would like us to use our imaginations and picture the circumstances of this couple over the years as they celebrate their anniversary.

~~Now I want you to~~ <sup>First</sup> Imagine this couple on their fifth wedding anniversary. For the past five years they have gotten into their wedding garb faithfully to have their picture taken. But this has been a bad year and they have

seriously considered calling off the yearly event. The man has been out of work for nearly the whole year. His unemployment benefits have run out and they have no savings. They barely are able to scrape together enough money for the rent. On top of that they have two little children, one of whom has needed a lot of medical attention the last year. The doctors bills have piled up. Both husband and wife are worried about the baby and how they are going to pay their bills. These are the circumstances that surround their fifth wedding anniversary.

They can't afford a professional photographer but their next door neighbor has come over with his Kodak instamatic to take their picture. Reluctantly they decide to go through with the ritual and go get their wedding clothes on. ~~They barely make it into their clothes now. Both have put on weight. But they manage to squeeze into their old garb.~~ As they stand there in the small living room all sorts of thoughts run through their heads. The wife sees the frayed rugs and wishes she had the money to buy <sup>luxurious</sup> oriental rugs and fine furniture like she had dreamed about before they got married. She gets quite depressed at times when she thinks of how little they have. The husband sees the stack of bills on his desk and a broken dolly lying on the floor in a heap.

He feels guilty that he hasn't been able to buy any nice toys for his children in a long time. Both husband and wife wonder, as they stand there to have their picture taken, if their marriage might have been a big mistake. Wouldn't it be great to fly away from all these responsibilities, <sup>and</sup> *Wouldn't it be great to be free again, to go back to the good old days - be free again? of independence?*

Then their neighbor says to them, "Now turn and face one another and repeat your marriage vows while I take the picture." So the husband begins, "I take thee to be my wedded wife; and I do promise and covenant; before God and these witnesses; to be thy loving and faithful husband; in plenty and in want..." What had he said? He stops abruptly. No sooner does he say these words than something flashes between his wife and himself as they look into one another's eyes. "In plenty and in want." That's what ~~we~~ <sup>I</sup> promised wasn't it? ~~he~~ <sup>I</sup> promised and, dog-gone-it, I'm going to keep my promise.

Now I want you to imagine this couple on their 25th wedding anniversary. What a change has taken place in their circumstances. The husband is now quite successful as an independent businessman. He owes his business and he's making all kinds of money. His wife has worked her way through college and has become a certified public accountant and is

also making all kinds of money. They now live in a <sup>large</sup> nice ~~white~~ colonial frame big house. They have beautiful <sup>antique</sup> furniture. They have a fire-place. Two new cars and one old car for the <sup>youngest</sup> ~~child~~ <sup>child still at home.</sup> 2 or 3 Televisions & telephones. But the husband has been terribly busy with his work. He often spends four or five nights a week in the office and rarely takes a vacation with his family. He hasn't had much time for his ~~growing~~ children. The youngest son who is about <sup>sixteen</sup> ~~fifteen~~ has been having some real problems in school. He's been ~~seen~~ smoking pot, ~~and~~ He runs with the wrong crowd. He failed a grade and now has gotten into some minor trouble with the law. They can't control him.

This has brought real tension into the marriage. For months <sup>husband & wife</sup> ~~they~~ have existed together in the same house in the atmosphere of a cold war. Last night they had been yelling at one another. "If you had spent more time with him instead of working every night this wouldn't have happened," the wife accuses her husband. The husband makes ~~his~~ counter-accusations. He blames his wife for working instead of staying home with the kids. "Sometimes I'm sorry we ever got married," he shouts angrily at his wife. There are tears and anger.

They don't want to go through the ritual of getting into their wedding clothes. <sup>on their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary.</sup> But they have hired a profes-

Oliver Mills

have already paid \$75

sional photographer whom they will have to pay anyway if they break the appointment so they belligerently get dressed.

Now they are standing in the living room before the photographer <sup>in a sulky mood.</sup> The photographer says, "Hey, now let's look happy.

This is your anniversary. Face one another and repeat your wedding vows while I take this picture." They turn and scowl at one another. Then she begins to say her vows. "I take thee to be my wedded husband; and I do promise and covenant; before God and these witnesses; to be thy loving and faithful wife; in plenty and in want; in joy and in sorrow." Her

<sup>Now they have no material wants. They have plenty</sup> voice softens. <sup>For the last year what sorrow has entered their lives because of their son.</sup> How the joy has gone out of their marriage. And they both think to themselves, "But we have promised.

By golly, we have promised before God and before all our dear friends. We promised. In joy and in sorrow. We promised. I'm going to keep my promise. I'm not going to break my promise now.

Now I want you to imagine this same couple on their 58th wedding anniversary. How time has flown. Their children are now all grown and married. They have grandchildren and even a few great grand-children, <sup>whose</sup> ~~those~~ their pictures are lined up on the mantle of the fireplace. <sup>They</sup> ~~The couple~~ have grown old <sup>and gray and wrinkled and worn out</sup> and they sometimes get confused. In the past year the wife has suffered a stroke. It <sup>has</sup> left her paralyzed in the left arm and has affected her speech. The <sup>authentic</sup> husband gets

around painfully with the help of a cane and he can't hear very well. They both know this may be their last anniversary together in this world. The whole family has gathered to celebrate this special day. One of the grand-daughters helps the old woman put on her wedding gown. It's now yellow with age. It has a few moth holes in it. It fits a bit more snugly than it used to. The old man has lost so much weight though that he is now thinner than he was on his wedding day and he pulls in the belt to the very last hole. He wears his old faded shirt and bow tie he wore so long ago. *Everything looks baggy on him now even his skin. The old man is a woman.*

~~And now the grand-children have steered them~~ to the

center of the room for the picture. A great-grand child cries in the play-plan. The room is crowded with family <sup>of all ages</sup> and everyone is smiling and happy <sup>and chattering away.</sup> Then the photographer says, "Will you face your <sup>beautiful</sup> bride and take her hand and repeat your wedding vows?" "What's that? What's he saying?" the old <sup>head of household</sup> man asks his daughter. <sup>The old man is a little senile</sup> ~~The old man~~ has forgotten many things, he <sup>he</sup> doesn't remember where he put his glasses. He is constantly losing his keys, unable to remember where he had them last. But he hasn't forgotten his wedding vows. The old man slowly and tenderly takes his wife's hand and looks deeply and with great love into the eyes of his beloved and begins, "I take thee; to be my wedded wife; and I do promise and covenant;

before God and these witnesses; To be thy loving and faithful husband; in plenty and in want; in joy and in sorrow; in sickness and in health;" ~~And then he pauses for a moment~~  
*The room is silent. Even the great-grand-child has stopped crying*  
 ^ and continues, "As long as we both shall live." And in their hearts they both know, "We have kept our promises. We have kept our promises!"

1 Cor 13:4-8

Now hear once more the Word of God. "Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful. It is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful... Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends."

AMEN