

## The Marriage Miracle

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on the Second Sunday after Epiphany, January 15, 1989. Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11.

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.**

What would it take to make your marriage really great? Would it take a miracle? "Well," you say, "Sometimes we go for days without saying much of anything to each other. And sometimes we fight. We really fight! Fortunately it doesn't happen very often, but when it does, we go at it hammer and tongs. It would really take a miracle to make our marriage great." Or someone else says, "My marriage isn't that bad really, but there's not much spark in it anymore. We get along fine. What I mean is, we put up with each other. I'd miss my wife- I'd really miss her if she died or something like that. But great? No, our marriage isn't really great. A miracle would help a lot." Well, don't feel bad if you think your marriage needs a miracle to make it come alive. I think this is true of most marriages. In fact, when you stop to analyze what marriage is, it's a miracle that any of them last.

Think of it! You have two very different people living together. That's why they married- they were different from each other. But as soon as they're married, each of them tries to make the other like themselves and that causes trouble. And then, they change over the years. Maybe they were teenagers when they got married. Maybe they hadn't gone together very long. Maybe they got married because she was pregnant, or maybe they they were just crazy about each other. But in a few years they lost some of their sexiness, they grew up and developed other interests. Children came. Troubles came, bad times, sorrow, sickness. And now they need a miracle just to keep their marriage going.

But even marriages that begin under the best circumstances need miracles. I know of marriages that began "perfectly". The bride came down the church aisle, and the well dressed guests all turned to watch her.

The groom was a fine handsome young man fresh out of college with a great job. Both of them were from the same type of family. They'd gone together for a long time. They were both in their mid-twenties. All the guests thought, "My, what a fine couple, and what a beautiful wedding, and what a great marriage this is going to be." But it didn't turn out that way. Today it's all over. What happened?

Well, their marriage needed a miracle in order to keep it going. All marriages need something special, some special attention from God Himself if they're going to last and be great marriages. A great marriage is a gift of God and it takes a miracle to make it great.

The first miracle Jesus performed was at a wedding celebration and in connection with marriage. The day had almost ended in disaster. Somebody had miscalculated. Maybe a lot of people forgot to send in their RSVPs and there were more people than expected. Whatever the cause, the wine almost ran out. People were standing around staring at their empty wine glasses and looking at their watches. But Jesus saved the day. He turned ordinary water into wine. Lots of wine. One hundred and twenty gallons of wine. That's 480, 1 liter carafes of wine. That's enough wine to keep the celebration going long after the wedding.

That's the kind of miracle Jesus wants to work in our marriages today. So often people get married in the intoxicating heat of passion and the rest of their lives together the intoxication wears off, the wine runs out, the passions cool. But sometimes I talk to couples who've been married for years and they talk as though their marriage has never been better. The excitement and intoxication had almost run out but now, perhaps after many dries years, it's come back again. "God has saved the best for last," they say.

Jesus performed his first miracle at a wedding and I believe he continues today to minister to us at weddings and in our marriages. A true marriage rests on a vow which people take in the presence of God and other witnesses. "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; As long as we both shall live."

Let's be very honest. Those vows aren't easy to keep. To be loving when your husband smashes up the car after telling him not to go out onto the icy roads, that's not easy. To be loving when the VISA bill comes due in January and you wonder who made all those purchases, that's not easy. It isn't easy to come home and be loving and romantic after you've put up all day with 30 kids in a classroom. It isn't easy to be loving when you've taken a nice, romantic bubble bath and put on a new lace negligee only to find your husband snoring and sound asleep.

The marriage vows are *not* easy to keep. It takes a miracle to keep them. And it takes another miracle to build confidence and trust once those vows have been broken. Many marriages don't last. And human sinfulness mars every relationship, even those marriages which last a lifetime.

But I find real encouragement listening to the stories of couples who've been married for many years; to hear them tell about the difficulties they've faced and how they worked together and were able to turn to one another after many years and say, "Look at this beautiful marriage of ours. God has really blessed us! It's taken years. 'Through many dangers, toils, and snares, we have already come. 'Tis grace hath brought us safe thus far. And grace will lead me home.'" They've tried to keep those radical promises they made to each other. They know that in many ways they've failed, but they also know their efforts have been strengthened by God and

that, by the grace of God, their actions, even their failures, have pointed to the faithfulness of God who never fails. When that happens it's a sign of the covenant relationship between Christ and the church. This unwavering and lifelong commitment is a sign both of God's steadfast covenant and of the high responsibilities of marriage.

Every marriage needs God. Every marriage needs a miracle. Nobody in their right mind claims that marriage is going to be clear sailing all the way. The marriage service in the Presbyterian church anticipates the reality of problems. We promise to be loving and faithful "in plenty and *in want*; in joy and *in sorrow*; *in sickness* and in health"- there'll be good times and bad times. There'll be times when the vows seem all but impossible to keep. But by holding fast to each other in trust, in patience, in hope, and by holding fast also to Him who has promised to be present whenever two or three are gathered together in his name as He was present that day in Cana of Galilee, the impossible becomes possible. Ordinary water becomes wine. An ordinary marriage shows forth the glory of Christ and, by grace, we become, little by little, more human in spite of ourselves, become whole, become truly loving and lovely at last.

That's the marriage miracle and that's why marriage is called "a holy estate" in our old Book of Common Worship. That's the sense also in which Jesus 'manifested his glory,' as the Gospel says, because the glory of Christ is the power of Christ to transform our ordinary lives, whether we're single or married, into a sign of his presence. Our prayer is that he work that miracle in us all.

Let us pray: Our heavenly Father, whose Son, our Lord, performed his first miracle in Cana of Galilee, by turning water into wine, may Christ be present in the lives of each one of us whether we are married, single, divorced, or widowed. Help us all to keep faith with others, to live, not for ourselves, but for others, and so become more fully human. Work in a miracle in our lives by turning our ordinary lives into a sign of the presence and glory of Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.

(I acknowledge my indebtedness to Joel Nederhood and Fred Buechner who preached sermons on this same text.)

I received some criticism <sup>4</sup> in Mrs about bubble bath  
and also miracle emphasis implies God is at fault if it fails