

Pastor Ed's Capital News Article for September.

Four Weddings and a Funeral

It has been said that, "life often imitates art." Just like the title of the 1995 British Romantic comedy, during the month of August, I officiated at "*Four Weddings and a Funeral*." Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, declares that there is a time for each of us to be born and a time to die. These same verses declare that, in the time, between those two dates, we will experience the agony and the ecstasy, of what we call, "*life*." The funeral, and each wedding where I officiated, represented a rite of passage on that journey.

I encouraged each couple to see their marriage as a new chapter in their lives. I wanted each of them to see that they had just finished a chapter of their lives. The first chapter began with their birth into a particular family. It was within their family of origin each matured and grew. I wanted them to see that their lives were influenced by many people, including their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, teachers, pastors, coaches and friends. Each of these people, and their interactions with each bride, and each groom, shaped and molded them as they grew and matured from infants into adults.

I asked each couple whether their birth into their family of origin, and each event in their lives which led to their wedding day, was just a string of random occurrences or the conscious guiding and shepherding of a force beyond their comprehension and control. I asked each bride and each groom to remember the time that they looked at the other and experienced that spark... that thought, when they looked at the other and said: "*this is the person I will marry*." Was the spark which blossomed into matrimonial love a random occurrence or the intentional action of a force beyond their comprehension and control? I assured them that their lives and their love were not random; rather, they were a result of the conscious shepherding of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

I asked each bride and groom to consider the power of their words. I asked them to remember the day they confessed their love for one another. Three little words, "*I love you*," changed everything for the pair. This trio of words changed the dynamic and the very future of the relationship of each couple. By these words, each confessed to the other a powerful, yet tender, passionate, and supremely romantic affection for one another. This was the first step in the creation of a lifelong relationship and lifelong commitments to one another.

I asked each of them to consider the words that they were going to speak on their wedding day. Each groom was going to take his bride as his wife, to have and to hold from that day forward, for better or for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, as long as they both live, and to pledge his faithfulness to his bride. Each bride was going to take her groom as her husband and made the very same promises of faithfulness and fidelity. I asked them to see that neither of them, by their own strength, has what it takes, without fail, and without exception, to love, honor, obey and be faithful to the other as long as they both live and to build a successful and lasting marriage. However, I immediately assured them not to despair.

I asked each couple to consider their actions. They had invited me to officiate at their marriage and solemnize their vows. By inviting me, they have invited God to their wedding. I assured them that the God wants not only to participate in their marriage ceremony, but also in their life together. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit want to walk with them and be active in writing this

new chapter of their lives. I assured them it was God's most passionate desire for the couple to have faith in Him and to bind them together with faith, love and trust in one another.

I assured the couple that God promises to use the vows they will speak and all that is to come in their lives - all the for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health - to make their faith, love and trust in Him and one another grow. God's desire is that the couple be immersed in His Word. God promises that His Word will transform them. The Holy Spirit works through that Word to plant God's love in the couple and God's love will bear fruit. God's love will act as an antidote to impatience, envy, jealousy, pride, boasting, selfishness, self-seeking and hostility. The love that God gives us is not easily angered and it keeps no record of wrongs. The love God gives us does not delight in evil but rejoices in truth. The love God gives us always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. God promises to help the couple to grow to love, think, plan, build and work as one.

At the funeral, we celebrated the life of a husband. We remembered who he was. We remembered the first chapter of his life. He was born into a certain family, in a certain town and country. His life was first shaped by his parents, sibling, relatives, friends, teachers, pastors, coaches and a cast of hundreds of others. The innocence of childhood and youth were disturbed by the winds of war. He and his family suffered horribly. These winds blew him from a Balkan nation to Greece and then to Canada.

We remembered how the second chapter in his life began - he met and married his beloved bride. God joined them together. They walked confidently into the future with God. On their journey they experienced, the *"for richer and poorer, for better and worse, and sickness and health."* God blessed them with a child, and then they tragically lost that child. They worked hard and saved. Through their years together God joined these *"living stones"* into His households (congregations) in Alberta, and then BC, where together they served Him. By the grace of God they persevered and built a life together. Their love for one another was evident to all who met them. This chapter came to a close when he passed from this life.

Most importantly, we came to realize that we can never really know the whole story of another person's life. It is impossible for one person to know the thoughts of another person. Only God knows every aspect of a person's life. Only God knows the noble thoughts and deeds and the sinful thought and deeds of every man and woman. In the end only God can write the chapters of any person's life. Only God could write this at the end of this man's Chapter 2:

"He passed from this life July 8th in Kelowna, BC, at age 89. During his life he: loved and hated; mourned and danced; experienced war and peace, killing and healing; lost and found; tore and mended; spoke and was silent; sowed and reaped; collected and downsized; worked hard; was a husband and a father; was good and noble; and was a sinner. However, the most important thing about him is that he believed in Me, that I created him. He believed that Jesus Christ, is My Son, became a man by the power of the Holy Spirit, was born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried, rose from the dead on the third day and will come back to judge the living and the dead. He believed in the Holy Spirit who called him to faith, enlightened and sanctified him. He believed that Jesus, innocent, suffering and death, paid for his sins, and as a result all his sins in Chapters 1 and 2, were forgiven and his slate was wiped clean. He believed that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and all who believe in Him, will live even though they die. He believed that all who live and believe in Jesus will never die. As a consequence, this man is not dead and his story is not over. Chapter 3 has begun, he is alive, and he is in heaven."

God's most passionate desire is to walk with you and be the author of your "*Chapters.*" You can hear His transforming Word and experience God's presence at a church near you. At Grace Lutheran we meet around God's Word on Sunday mornings at 9:00AM and 10:30AM, and we extend a warm welcome for you to join us!

Pastor Ed