

“The Marriage of Hearts”

The Rev. Drew Willard
UCC at The Villages, FL
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2nd Sun. after Epiphany

Isaiah 62:1-5

John 2:1-11

‘The Lord will be pleased because of you, just as a husband is pleased with his bride.’

Isaiah 62:5b

Let us pray... O God,
May the American Dream and the ‘Dream’ of Beloved Community
become realized as a social reality, a marriage of Heaven and Earth.

Amen

Last weekend at Savannah Center,
the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Commemorative Breakfast was held
with more than 600 people in attendance.

It was a fine tribute to Dr. King – as well as to Dr. Lew Jones,
who has led the planning committee in organizing and promoting this event
over the past 10 years.

Our church was among the biggest donors to help provide scholarships
to 6 high school students from Wildwood and Leesburg
as well as The Villages Charter School.

I am glad to see that Dr. King’s work has continued to be important
here in Central Florida.

Martin Luther King has become a household name,
like George Washington or Abraham Lincoln.

I remember seeing his picture on the wall of an elementary school
and wondering if young people these days, thought about him
any more than my generation thought about Washington or Lincoln...

It took being snow-bound in West Virginia
on the first celebration of Dr. King’s birthday in 1986,
for me to recognize that he was a hero for us all.

I was sick in a hotel bed, watching the celebrity activities on TV,
when I heard his “I Have a Dream” speech again – but as if for the first time.

The image of black and white people sitting down together
for table fellowship was very moving to me.

I resolved to learn more about him and his teachings.

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I discovered a book of his collected writings and speeches called A Testament of Hope.

Early on, he wrote about 'love' as a concept – in fact, the guiding principle for his life work.

He described the different forms of 'love' according to Greek philosophy that include 'eros' – romantic love of physical desire, 'philos' – transactional love between friends, and 'agape' – unconditional love of God for humanity.

It was this form of love called 'agape' that was the focus of King's message which he developed in his writings about 'beloved community'.

In his last speech to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, King said:

“...one of the great problems of history is that the concepts of love and power have usually been contrasted as opposites...

so that love is identified with a resignation of power, and power with a denial of love...

Now, we've got to get this thing right.

What is needed is a realization that

power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic.

Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love...”

King realized 'beloved community' was not a sentimental vision, but a tangible goal of the Civil Rights movement for African-Americans and 'agape' love as a practical strategy to get there.

This was demonstrated in the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi who achieved liberation of his Indian homeland from Great Britain by applying 'satyagraha', an ancient Sanskrit word meaning 'truth force' or 'soul force' – basically, love in action.

One of the most amazing concepts key to the successes of both Gandhi and Dr. King, is the idea that in the midst of nonviolent, direct action in opposition to an enemy – you must love them, even when you dislike them for what they do to you.

Racial conflict, sectarian violence, and hate crimes would seem like the irreconcilable differences of a bad marriage, where people just want to get away from each other.

The obvious analogy with this antagonism between groups of people divided by race, gender, beliefs, generation, or culture, would seem to be like an abusive marriage.

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That would be a situation in which there is no chance for love to work,
but that shouldn't be the first way to look at most conflicts
within societies or between societies.

Not all troubled marriages are abusive
or hopeless with no chance for love to work.

Though the extreme position taken by advocates of any group
may seem like they speak for everybody, not all in the group
are super-patriots or saints or whatever the extreme ideal may be.

There will always be moderates
practicing the Golden Rule of doing good unto others
while hoping to raise their children in healthy and happy homes.

So, sectarian conflicts – as vicious as they may be
between ethnic groups, between political groups, between religious factions,
even between Palestinians & Israelis,
for the sake of the moderates caught in the middle,
these are like troubled marriages that still have hope for reconciliation.

Granted, they are often “arranged marriages” –
arranged by history and arranged by the prejudices of previous generations,
but there is still hope for Beloved Community.

In any healthy marriage there must be give & take –
a willingness to compromise for mutual goals
without compromising each other's dignity;
and there must be communication seasoned with humor.
So, there would be a chance for love to work.

The weddings I have performed through the past 16 years,
have taught me there are three marriages that must take place.

There is the celebration of family & friends in a public ceremony,
inviting God's blessing and care.

There is the license for recognizing a couple's rights in society
from health care to passports.

Then there is “the marriage of hearts”
and if that agreement has not been made, then the other two are invalid,
no matter how much is spent on the wedding
or what the documentation says.

This is not to say that such a love is sentimental and everyone is happy all the time.
On the contrary, it is the love of God – agape love,
that arises even amidst the most terrible circumstances.

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It is a defiant love that says,

“We two together are a multitude.”

It is also what Jesus said in Mark 10:9,

“Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

The world is growing and groaning toward a new ethic –
an ethic based on love and not the demands of society’s commerce.

As gay & lesbian couples struggle throughout the world –

as well as here in Florida, to have legalized marriages in society,
all couples can take a lesson from the reality of relationship.

The authority to be a couple doesn’t come from

a minister’s blessing or a clerk’s license,
but from a commitment that is already true
and continually renewed with great effort.

This is a gift from God – what ‘God has joined together’.

One day, gay & straight communities everywhere, will recognize
we are all already “married” to each other as a Beloved Community.

This is certainly an “arranged marriage” of people thrown together
by circumstance – not by choice.

Yet, it is of God’s purpose that all people ought to be free and
live authentic and abundant lives as true human beings –

just as the relationship between black & white people
has been an inconvenient, but hopeful marriage
in the struggle for Civil Rights.

Perhaps you didn’t know that Martin Luther King, Jr. was a “Trekkie” –
a fan of the original TV series, “Star Trek”,

that featured African American actress, Nichelle Nichols,
as Lt. Uhura, an officer on the spaceship, Enterprise.

At one point, Nichelle Nichols wanted to leave the series after the first year
to pursue new career opportunities.

The producer, Gene Roddenberry, was distressed at this and
asked her to think about it over the weekend.

It so happened she attended an NAACP fundraising event
at which Dr. Martin Luther King came up to her and
introduced himself as her biggest fan.

When she told him she planned to leave Star Trek,
he urged her to reconsider because of the great service she was doing
as a black person on American TV every week,
portraying a character in a future when race wouldn’t matter.

<http://geektyrant.com/news/2010/1/19/the-touching-true-story-of-how-martin-luther-king-got-nichel.html>

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It so happened, that she & William Shatner – who played Captain Kirk, would have the first televised ‘interracial kiss’.

There was a lot of drama about this on the set – and though the script called for Kirk & Uhura to kiss, the director was under pressure from studio executives who were not comfortable with the scene.

They would have to film two versions – one where they were kissing and the other where they just hugged.

It was getting late, the last scene of the day, and Shatner kept asking for retakes of the kiss.

In utter exasperation, the director said they had time for only one more shot, and with his back to the director, but facing the camera, Captain Kirk embraced Lieutenant Uhura without kissing her.

The next day, when the director and company reps reviewed the film shot the previous day, they found that Shatner had embraced Nichols, looked up at the camera, and crossed his eyes, spoiling the shot – and ensuring that history was made with the first interracial kiss on national TV in America.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3hKKkGhEDoU>

Jesus turned water into wine and that is what we can do when we live from our hearts – when we love.

We can turn the ordinary into something extraordinary.

We can even transform enemies into people we love and who love us back in return.

From the Sufi mystic tradition of Islam:

“I, you, he, she, we.

In the garden of mystic lovers these are not true distinctions.”

Amen

Isaiah 62:1-5

62 Jerusalem, I will speak up for your good.

I will never be silent till you are safe and secure, sparkling like a flame.

2 Your great victory will be seen by every nation and king;
the Lord will even give you a new name.

3 You will be a glorious crown, a royal headband, for the Lord your God.

4 Your name will no longer be “Deserted and Childless,”
but “Happily Married.”

You will please the Lord; your country will be his bride.

5 Your people will take the land, just as a young man takes a bride.

The Lord will be pleased because of you,
just as a husband is pleased with his bride.

John 2:1-11

2 Three days later Mary, the mother of Jesus,
was at a wedding feast in the village of Cana in Galilee.

2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited and were there.

3 When the wine was all gone, Mary said to Jesus,
“They don’t have any more wine.”

4 Jesus replied,
“Mother, my time hasn’t yet come:
You must not tell me what to do.”

5 Mary then said to the servants,
“Do whatever Jesus tells you to do.”

6 At the feast there were six stone water jars
that were used by the people for washing themselves
in the way that their religion said they must.
Each jar held about twenty or thirty gallons.

7 Jesus told the servants to fill them to the top with water.
Then after the jars had been filled, 8 he said,
“Now take some water and give it to the man in charge of the feast.”

The servants did as Jesus told them,
9 and the man in charge drank some of the water
that had now turned into wine.

He did not know where the wine had come from,
but the servants did.

He called the bridegroom over 10 and said,
“The best wine is always served first.
Then after the guests have had plenty, the other wine is served.
But you have kept the best until last!”

11 This was Jesus' first miracle, and he did it in the village of Cana in Galilee.
There Jesus showed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.