The Love of God Made Manifest in Your Marriage

I John 4:7-19

Talk of love is quite abundant in today’s world. And it seems apparent and natural that on the occasion of a wedding, there would be plenty of references to love as Christopher and Julie come together to declare their love for one another and so pledge to be husband and wife to each other until death parts them. But the love of which we hear from God’s Word is not to be confused with the sloppy sentimentalisms that are often used to describe love by our contemporaries. Over sixty years ago, Dietrich Bonhoeffer commented that in our world love defines God, but in the Bible, God defines love. Worldly definitions of love are so vapid and empty because they center in the self, they reflect our preferences and choices. Marriages that are based on our self-created definitions of love are in trouble from the start. Every pastor has listened to the man or woman on the verge of divorce, attempting to justify the dissolving of a marriage say “I just don’t love him or her anymore.” When love is taken to be a mere emotional attraction, it is easy to conclude that if the feeling evaporates that love is gone. No love, no marriage.

But this is not the love that the Apostle John speaks of in the reading chosen by Christopher and Julie as the text for their wedding. You see, in the epistle of I John, love does not define God for that would make of the Living God a false god. Rather God defines love. John puts it like this: “In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we live through him.” God’s definition of love is spelled out by His Son, Jesus Christ. God’s definition of love is cruciform in shape for therein is love not that we have loved God but that God loved us and gave His Son as the atoning sacrifice for our sin. While we were yet His enemies Christ died for us, reconciling us to Himself by the blood of the cross. Here is a love that really may be called passion in that in His desire to be our Savior, the Son of God suffers for us that He may never be without us or us without Him.

Christopher and Julie, you know the love of Jesus Christ for through His Holy Spirit He has called you to faith in Himself. The knowledge of our Lord’s love for you has shaped your lives, leading you to come to Concordia Theological Seminary to prepare yourself, Christopher, for the preaching office and Julie to prepare yourself to serve as a deaconess in the Lord’s church. In God’s good providence, it was here that you came to know one another and see in each other the one who would be partner in that life-long estate of marriage that God Himself instituted in the garden as He gave Adam a wife of his own flesh and bone.
Now you are stepping into the estate of marriage to which the Lord God has called you. It is a vocation of love for you are given to love each other with the very love that comes from the heart of God Himself. Not a fleeting and momentary impulse, but the steadfast and undying love that went the way of Calvary. This is the love that John writes of in our text. It is the love that the Apostle Paul describes in Ephesians 5 where he lifts up the marriage of Christians as the very icon of the love that the heavenly Bridegroom Jesus Christ has for His Bride, the Church. Jesus suffers the cross for His Bride, loving her to the point of giving His life for the sake of His beloved, dying that she may live. So, your calling as husband, Christopher is to cherish Julie with our Lord’s own sacrificial love. And Julie you are to submit to that love, to receive it even as the church submits to Christ Jesus, receiving the gifts of His love. God’s will for your marriage is that it be a place where His own love is put on display as you cling to each other in steadfast faithfulness all the days of your life. In this love, you will forgive one another as God in Christ has forgiven you. And if it is the will of the Lord, this love will engender children for you to care for as a trust from the Creator Himself. Your calling in marriage is to receive God’s gifts by faith as joint heirs of the grace of life and then to be channels for His love and mercy in the world.

God has brought you to this day. Baptized into the name of the Triune God, your lives have unfolded within His good and gracious will. God grant that the love of His Son may guard and keep you all the days of your life together and finally bring you safely to the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end. Amen.

-Prof. John T. Pless