

LIVING TOGETHER IN UNITY



Sermon 872

August 17, 2014

Tenth Sunday after Pentecost

959th Week as Priest

785th Week at St Dunstan's

50th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

I have a rare opportunity today to preach on the psalm, and I'm going to take it. Psalm 133, often known by its Latin name—*Ecce, quam bonum!*—is the motto of my seminary, St. Luke's School of Theology at Sewanee, The University of the South. Now I don't know very much Latin at all, but I can tell you that this means, "Oh, how good and pleasant it is," the first line of the psalm. And note that it ends in an exclamation point, a rarity among the psalms, but an important one because it celebrates the goodness and joy found when people live together in unity.

On the Holy Mountain, another name for the Domain, the campus of Sewanee, Leigh and I found such an atmosphere of goodness and peace and joy and beauty for the five summers we spent there, that we felt firsthand *Ecce, quam bonum!* It was truly that good and pleasant to live and study and swim and cycle and simply to be there.

Ten years ago, I had finished all my coursework and passed my comprehensive examinations and defended my dissertation, which was a biography of the Right Reverend William G. McDowell, Jr., the Fifth Episcopal Bishop of Alabama. My committee members—Marion Hatchett, Don Armentrout, and Emmett Gribbin—were all satisfied with the work I had done, and they signed the printed copies for the DuPont Library.

It was the single most important learning experience of my life, and my lengthy college career, and I came home to Auburn with my head still in the clouds over the Cumberland Plateau.

I walked into Jerry's Barber Shop next door to St. Dunstan's, plopped down in the chair, and Jerry said, "Well, young man, whatcha been doing this summer?"

Jerry was a strange little man, whose mood swings were highly unpredictable and unexpected. He could go from ecstatic to sinister in a second, so you never knew if he was going to give you the best haircut of your life, or slit your throat right there in the barber chair. He talked non-stop, and often the subject of his monologue would throw him into a rage. But this time, he listened as I was the blabbermouth. I told him all about bring in school at Sewanee, the mountain, my coursework, and the tests and papers, the dissertation, all of it. I bragged and boasted and blew my own horn for maybe five or ten minutes. All the time Jerry was furiously snipping at my hair, clipping my eyebrows, the hair in my ears and nose, and breathing hard. At last, I stopped talking, and Jerry stopped cutting.

Then he exhaled loudly and said, "Well, young man, I think everybody ought to go to *Vacation Bible School*."



How good and pleasant it is, when people live together in unity! The people that I am thinking of this morning, in particular, are Jimmy and Betty Weldon, who celebrate 54 years of marriage this week.

I believe in marriage, and I believe that marriage should be lifelong, healthy, and life-giving to both wife and husband. Marriage, in my view, is God's best intention for us. Not that everybody should be married, or that all marriages should last, but that when it is done right, with God's blessing and plenty of important conversation, marriage can be the best thing that has ever happened to two people.

And that's why I believe that marriage is the most important of relationships. Marriage, says the psalmist, is a blessing ordained by God, and it is a promise of abundant life.

Leigh and I will have been married only 37 years in a couple of weeks, but Jimmy and Betty chose each other

more than a half-century ago, and they are celebrating that complete, unqualified commitment to each other this morning. And we get to be their witnesses!

Of course, anyone who has ever been married knows that marriage can also be the most difficult of relationships. Even in a healthy and strong marriage there will be times of adversity, sorrow, suffering, and disappointment. But I believe that people are made for each other, and that we are intended to live in relationship in order better to survive the difficult times, and even to learn from them.

One of my favorite movies is “As Good As It Gets.” At a point in the movie, Jack Nicholson turns to Helen Hunt and says, “You make me want to be a better man.” He sees that their relationship has become a whole lot more than romance and friendship. He understands that he is completely committed to her, and she is to him, and he wants to work hard to live up to that commitment. They find that they are living together in unity, and that makes all the difference.

Fifty-four years ago, Jimmy and Betty made promises and vows to each other. Today we celebrate the life they have made with and for each other ...

Dearly beloved: We have come together in the presence of God to witness and bless the joining together of this man and this woman in Holy Matrimony. The bond and covenant of marriage was established by God in creation, and our Lord Jesus Christ adorned this manner of life by his presence and first miracle at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It signifies to us the mystery of the union between Christ and his Church, and Holy Scripture commends it to be honored among all people.
AMEN.