

SERMON 943

Marriage of Brad Ford and Taylor Manning

Saturday, June 20, 2015

1,002nd Week as Priest

829th Week at St Dunstan's

94th Week at Epiphany-Tallassee

THE BEGINNING OF EVERYTHING

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

"I fell in love with her courage, her sincerity, and her flaming self respect. And it's these things I'd believe in, even if the whole world indulged in wild suspicions that she wasn't all she should be. I love her and it is the beginning of everything."

Thanks to F. Scott Fitzgerald for those words from *The Great Gatsby*, and thanks to Brad Ford and Taylor Manning for reminding us all that marriage is truly "The Beginning of Everything."

It's true, you know. Marriage is like getting a new job: everything is brand new. You have no experience whatsoever, and you really have no idea how to do this new thing, being married. What is it, after all? The

marriage of true minds? A marriage of convenience? Sort of like playing house together, only you made it official? No, actually marriage is different from anything you have previously experienced.

Marriage is the Most Important of Relationships. Marriage is God's best intention for us as human beings. And here I mean that God wants us to live in healthy, lifelong, life-giving relationships. Jesus said so himself. "From the beginning," he said, "God made them male and female. And for this reason, a man shall leave his mother and father and be joined to his wife, and the two become one."

This is the way that things are supposed to be. Brad finds Taylor somehow, by some remarkable coincidence, by some fluke of nature, he finds her across the Great Wide Universe, and he is dumbstruck by her courage, her sincerity, and her flaming self respect. He is quite taken by her, you see.

And she? Well, he had her at "My name is Brad; what's yours?" Maybe it was what he said, or maybe just the way he said it. That kind of smirk that is almost a smile, or yes, it is in fact a smile, only it takes a while to develop into its full potential. And she watches him as the smile unfolds and he beams at her and she is quite

taken by him, you see.

This is chemistry, and biology. This is poetry, and it's also thermodynamics. This thing that happens between a man and a woman. It is complicated, you see, because it's romance and it's friendship, and perhaps most of all, it's commitment. It is quite remarkable, and I highly recommend it to you.

So what do you think are the chances that you might stumble into the path of your one true love? What do you think is the likelihood that out of, what is it, seven billion people on the planet, that you might run into the one true, honorable, and altogether attractive person who is your soul mate, your long lost love, your Alpha and Omega? Well, it's not likely at all. No more than getting struck by lightning. Or having a meteor fall from distant heavens and crush you like a bug.

Except for that one thing. You know, that one thing. I'm talking about Holy Coincidence, of course. The rest of the world looks upon such things as random, and totally arbitrary, and no more significant than the roll of dice or the shuffling of a deck of cards. But we know better. We know that the God of the Universe has us in the palm of his hand. We know that our God considers our lives to be of infinite importance.

And he tells us this, over and over again. He sent his Son, his only Son, into the world to save us from sin and death. Now, think about it. If he would do this, then surely, surely, he would want us to be made whole and complete and healthy and fulfilled in that Most Important of Relationships. Marriage.

I know what I'm talking about. I've had marriage conversations with hundreds of people who were wanting to get married. I've actually married hundreds of people. It's my secret scheme: I'm going to turn the world into Episcopalians, one couple at a time!

But far more important than that, is the simple fact that I have been married for almost forever. Or at least close: thirty-seven years. I met this little redheaded girl at my office building in 1976. She was cute, and I liked her a lot. We went out on a date. We had fun. I liked her even more. Then she asked me out. We went to a wedding, of all things, which I thought was a terrible idea for a second date. I mean, what was thinking of going on a second date to a wedding at the Episcopal Church? I must have been crazy. Well, I probably was, at least a little. Crazy about her, is more like it. So we went on a second date, to a wedding, at an Episcopal Church in Montgomery.

And, guess what, I fell in love--with the prayer book, and the liturgy, and the architecture, and the music, and the people in the pews, and the priest performing the ceremony, and the bride and groom, and, yes, the cute redheaded girl sitting in the pew next to me.

And it wasn't anything I did, or she did, or anybody else did. It was simply a case of Holy Coincidence. That is, what looks to most people like something completely random, or arbitrary, with no meaning or significance at all, is actually something "of God." God makes these things happen. They look like coincidences, but they are not. They are Holy Coincidences. And it's best to be paying attention when they happen. And if you are paying attention, you'll see that they happen a lot more often than you had ever imagined.

It's what F. Scott Fitzgerald called "The Beginning of Everything." It's where your life begins. It's where you realize that you are aware of what's going on in your one amazing, individual, and unique life. It's the Beginning of Everything. St. Paul called living "in Christ." You suddenly realize that you—and everybody else in the world—are of infinite importance to Almighty God. And that's a staggering realization.

Martin Bell, my good friend and a really gifted priest, used to say, “The past is approved.” Everything that has ever happened to you, good and bad, deserved and undeserved, is approved. Not because it was the way that your life should be, or even could be, but because it has brought you to the place where you are, right now, at this point, this fullness of time. And that makes it approved. Because at this very moment, your life is full of possibility and opportunity. It is the Beginning of Everything.

St. Paul wrote about this too: “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.”

So you see, marriage is a new creation. The two people who are getting married don't really understand what's going on, and they sure can't look into a crystal ball and predict what's going to happen. They are living by faith, and that's about all. They believe in the grace of God, that God would bless them and I sure believe that's what happens in the Sacrament of Marriage. Once we are done here, you will know for certain that Brad and Taylor are married—once and for all.

And I for one think it's absolutely wonderful. These two young people love each other. They want to spend their lives together. And they need your blessing and your support. Not criticism. Not imposed expectations. Not even your well-intentioned advice. No, let them figure it out on their own. Give them the benefit of the doubt, and realize that they do know what they are doing. Because for Taylor and Brad, this is the Beginning of Everything. AMEN.