

Sermon Ordinary Sunday 27 Year C 2022

Good things come to those who wait, or so the saying goes. Good things come to those who wait. And I hope, Greg and Sandra, you think the wait was worth it! It is a joy to share this celebration with you today, with your friends and families and loved ones. And it is right and good that we are here, in a place that has become a spiritual home for Greg and Sandra. And it is right that we witness and affirm their love before God, and seek the blessing and nourishment that God gives us at his altar. We gather here as a family around the family table. And while this is a special occasion, it is also an ordinary occasion: the family of God doing what the family of God does, week in week out; heeding the Father's invitation to share at the family table.

So, the bible readings set before us today might seem a bit odd and not quite right for a wedding. And if you thought that you would be quite right! That is because what we are doing today is what we would have done anyway. And because Greg and Sandra said they wanted the celebration of their love to be within the context of a 'normal Sunday service'. And that just goes to show how much Greg and Sandra feel at home here, how much they feel part of the family of God here. And they are mindful that their celebration today is *not* in fact the main show.

Still, what holy church has set as the bible readings for this Sunday, may yet have something to say to them, and the occasion of their wedding. In the little portion from the Second Letter to Timothy, we hear Saint Paul write, *'fan into a flame the gift that God has given you... God's gift was not a spirit of timidity, but the Spirit of power, and love, and self-control. Fan into a flame the gift that God has given you. It's a beautiful image. It evokes the idea of being huddled over a small fire coaxing the flame back to life. In the age before matches and instant lighters, the fire in a home's hearth had to be protected - kept alight - for the next day's duties of washing and cooking and cleaning. The flame might be preserved overnight by an oil lamp or such. Or the cool embers had to be reignited: fanned back into a flame.*

It is a sad truth that many people do not fan God's gifts into a flame. It may be the case that what was once given has been allowed to grow cold. The embers allowed to slowly fade, and eventually be extinguished altogether. Amongst the greatest of God's gifts to us is companionship and friendship, and as Paul reminds us today, love! Greg and Sandra remind us today that it is never too late to reignite those embers! The temptation may have been to think their moment had passed.

But love, friendship, and companionship are precious things, too precious to allow to fade and grow cold. Our Lord in the Gospel today encourages us to see that even the very smallest signs of hope - the very tiniest seeds of life - can surprise us, can grow into something wonderful and beautiful and magnificent! A cool ember can become a blazing fire. A small and unremarkable seed can flourish.

Marriage is one of the key gifts God gives us for our human flourishing. And this is why the church takes marriage so seriously. Marriage is not just a ceremony. Marriage is not just a social institution. Marriage is not just a remnant of the patriarchal establishment. No. Marriage is a gift of God to aid us in our flourishing. Sandra and Greg recognise this. They recognise that marriage is their path to human flourishing. It is a *good thing*. So, hold fast to it! In that little portion to the letter to Timothy, Paul also writes, *You have been trusted to look after something precious; guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us*. Care of precious things doesn't just happen. They have to be actively guarded, protected, cherished.

But all of you here today are part of this. You are not here just to look pretty. Yes, you all look beautiful today. But that's not what you're here for. And you're not here just for cake afterwards. No. In being here today you agree to assist Sandra and Greg in their life together. Because they cannot do it without your support. We live such individualised, fragmented lives we find it almost impossible to imagine we have obligations to each other. But if we want to flourish – not just survive - as human beings, we actually need each other. They need your help, just as they need each other. We need each other to properly fan the flame, each other to guard what is precious.

Greg and Sandra, marriage is a good thing. It is worth the wait! It will be the path to your mutual flourishing. There is not one way to live out or to realise that flourishing. A flame is a difficult thing to contain. A tree will grow as it will. And every couple must negotiate amongst themselves the look and the shape of their life together. But whichever way, it will be the path by which you fulfil what God has called you to be. Difficult? Yes! But that is why you have called family and friends here today to support you and uphold you, and to help keep you accountable. And why you turn this day to Christ, to see in his life the path of sacrificial love. And why you come before God and seek his blessing. So, may God indeed bestow upon you his grace and all the gifts you need to flourish. And may we all learn to guard – and fan into a flame! - what we know to be precious. Amen.