



For the longest time, it was always my uncle John who presided at any family wedding. He had this comforting smile about him that could miraculously calm any anxiety level of newlyweds or their parents or event coordinators or whoever else came in for a Friday evening rehearsal wondering how in the world it was all going to come together the following afternoon. He had this contagious laughter that could alter an entire bridal party and the random collection of family and friends: that no matter what stress they brought with them into that sanctuary, God's joy over the occasion was more than enough to match it all.

Now, for most people he was Pastor John. After a couple congregations in northwest Ohio, he was called to the Twin Cities of Minnesota, where it is still believed to be the highest concentration of us crazy Lutherans in this country. And yet, time and time again, he would be called back for a family wedding in the Buckeye state, because he had this smile about him that made you believe in love all the more.

He had this laughter that put goodness into needed perspective. He had this way of convincing any anxious newlywed couple or set of parents or stressed-out anyone of the beautiful hope from that first verse of the Psalm we heard: that no matter how lonely we might feel with our angst or fears or worries, God would never ever be far away. Instead, God would insist on always being right there beside us with more than enough joy to match whatever we carried on our hearts and minds.

I still remember the last time I saw him up front in a sanctuary, in this relatively smaller church in Iowa, for his precious granddaughter's wedding. And I still remember his homily, because he quoted perhaps the most famous one given at such a ceremony in recent memory. It was one spoken about 4,000 miles away from that little church building, in front of the most popular set of newlyweds in decades, not to mention a worldwide audience of hundreds of millions of people. My uncle quoted the homily given by Bishop Michael Curry of the Episcopal Church in front of Prince Harry and Megan Markle. Words with a prophetic delivery that amazed onlookers at St. George's Chapel in England, and those watching on television all over the earth, and words that were just as captivating in a small church in Iowa a couple months later. Words insisting that God would never leave us, to be sure, but also of a love so enthralling that we cannot help but join in the holy movement that is somehow, someway, still thriving thousands of years later. Words that are just as true for any wedding or worship or for anyone who wonders how in the world can humanity survive. A portion went like this:

*Someone once said that Jesus began the most revolutionary movement in all of history, a movement grounded in the unconditional love of God for the world. And a movement mandating people to live that love. And in so doing, to change not only their lives, but the very life of the world itself. I'm talking about some power, real power, power to change the world. When love is the way, unselfish, sacrificial, redemptive, when love is the way, then no child will go to bed hungry in this world ever again. When love is the way, we will let justice roll down like a mighty stream and righteousness like an ever-flowing brook. When love is the way, poverty will become history. When love is the way, the Earth will be a sanctuary. When love is the way, we will lay down our swords and shields, down by the riverside, to study war no more. When love is the way,*

*there's plenty good room, plenty good room, for all of God's children because when love is the way, we actually treat each other well, like we are actually family. When love is the way, we know that God is the source of us all and we are brothers and sisters, children of God. My brothers and sisters, that's a new heaven, a new Earth, a new world, a new human family.*

Some still remember those words because of a royal wedding and all, but I will remember them more from a little church in Iowa, because it was the last time I saw my uncle preside over a family wedding before he died from cancer. That meant it was my turn this past weekend. There wasn't a space for a homily last Saturday, and probably all the better as I did not want to sweat out the newlyweds or family and friends amidst the blistering heat outside. So, we just had to proclaim the Divine message elsewhere in the service. And so, yes, we ensured to bless the couple: to reassure them that God was never going to be far away from whatever stresses they endured together; that God would always insist on being right beside them with more than enough joy to match whatever would come in their marital journey.

But we also made sure to include a plea similar to that made by Bishop Curry in front of hundreds of millions, and from my uncle in front of a much smaller crowd: that this newlywed couple was also called to be a beacon of that love to amaze onlookers of their life together. That this love of God further ignited within them last Saturday afternoon, would not be satisfied whatsoever to just stay between them, but to flow over into the lives of their family and friends and complete strangers along the way. That they, too, would be helpers whenever angst or fear or worry would attempt to take over those around them. Because this love of God could not stay in first century Galilee or within the confines of a royal chapel or within the walls of any church building. This love insists on still shaping a new heaven, a new Earth, a new world, a new human family. I suppose that's part of the reason why a pastor from Minnesota always had this comforting smile and contagious laughter about him, because he was always under the impression there was more than enough joy from God over all of us to match whatever this world would throw at us then, now, and forevermore. So, for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!