

Peter & Charisa's Wedding Homily

2009 July 4

Revelation 19:6 Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. ⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.' ⁸ It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. ⁹ Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

Peter and Charisa, all of us have waited a long time for this day. It is incredibly fun to be here in New Jersey with you. Many of the folks in this room, who are here to celebrate this momentous day with you, know your relationship from when you guys had just met. It gives the rest of us encouragement that blind dates can work out well, at least if you have a friend like Nancy to set you up. What I'm going to do is reflect a bit of your courtship story, partly because not everyone here knows both of you and both sides of your story, but also because your story reveals something about all our stories, and even God's story.

Peter, I've known you for 8 years now, and Charisa, I only had the privilege of meeting you after you and Peter started dating. So I have to tell you that I asked some of your friends, Charisa, if they could tell me a little bit more about you and your side of things.

Most of us know that you were set up by your mutual friend Nancy. It's amazing that each of you asked her the same question, 'Yeah, but is this other person interested in missions?' that is, in leaving what you know in the U.S. to advance the love of Jesus in the world that he is reclaiming? Maybe you felt your heart skip a beat when Nancy responded 'yes.' Then, when you had your first meeting on April 5, 2008, you had a lot to talk about: the different places you've been, the way God had shaped your hearts for His world, and the dreams you have. Peter, you wanted to see how Charisa would respond, so you decided to lay your heart out there. You shared about how you wanted to live and work in communities of global poverty, because you wanted to love the poor, and why that reflects God's love. Charisa was not intimidated. Instead, you thought, 'I appreciate how much of a deep thinker he is, but he's preaching at me!' But that didn't deter you, Charisa – bless your heart. You walked him to Chinatown for his next meeting and shared about another love of yours: watching sports on ESPN! I think Peter might have been putty in your hands from that point.

I got an email from you, Peter, on May 20, 2008, just five weeks later, saying, 'Just thought I'd let you know that Charisa and I decided to start dating...She's a great girl and hopefully you can meet her in the future sometime.' So it was that your friendship turned into talk of the possibility of much more, and your courtship began.

Some of us got to be with you when your courtship had gone a bit further, when we got to see the ways you guys fit with one another, as you continued working out this process of moving from two lives to becoming one. Given that you are young, idealistic, adventuresome, full of strong convictions, you had a lot to talk about, and some finer points of different to iron out. We have

watched you guys seek earnestly to love God together. We saw your romantic love grow as we watched you talk on the phone, have intense conversations, make trips between New York and Boston, and cheer for your teams. Peter learned to play Scrabble on Facebook with Charisa. Charisa learned to ride a bike with Peter. There was a night in Flushing when Peter told Charisa that he couldn't wait to spend the rest of his life together with her in the mission field in China. And then there was that fateful day trip on a cold and windy day in Rockport where Peter proposed. Since then, you have been waiting for this day, your wedding.

Scripture also talks with breathless anticipation about a wedding. This wedding, the one described in Revelation 19, is going to be the wedding to end all weddings – the one for which all creation and all of history has been longing. Like your wedding, this wedding will engage all of our senses. To help celebrate your wedding, you guys called together voices in song, and we'll have a special song in a minute. The ultimate wedding envisioned by Scripture is also heralded by a song: 'And from the throne came a voice saying, 'Praise our God, all you His servants and all who fear Him, small and great.' Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns.' In this wedding, voice upon voice upon voice will come together, growing in an ever increasing crescendo, to praise the One who is the source of all love.

Like the beauty of your wedding, and of you, Charisa, as the bride, the wedding at the end of the age will be beautiful, because the announcement will ring out, 'Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure.' And of course, just like we are looking forward to having a great feast with you, this future wedding will involve a great feast. 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.' In Scripture, the closest, most joyous fellowship is symbolized by eating at the table together.

You see, in this final wedding at the end of time, the groom will be Jesus. The bride will be us – his people, the church, collectively. We will find ourselves walking down the aisle, beautiful, toward the one who has waited to unite himself fully with us. At this ultimate celebration, every person who has entered into a relationship with Jesus, every person who knows and trusts Him, will be fully joined with him. What we have known in part, we will come to fully know, even as we are fully known. The wedding, the marriage...is the closest analogy Scripture gives us for what this ultimate union with Jesus will be like. When we are fully joined with Jesus, we will experience a oneness with him for Eternity that is even more deep and more complete than the oneness we have with him now, that is even more deep and completely than the oneness you will share with one another from this day forward. At this ultimate celebration, the wedding feast of Jesus, Jesus himself will meet all our deepest and truest longings.

Indeed, in the view of Scripture, all human weddings are a hint of, a shadow of, a window into, the greatest wedding yet to come. From the beginning of human history, God placed in us the desire to not be alone, so that ultimately He Himself will fill our need through Jesus. Seen in this light, marriage is a big way that God teaches us about the oneness He wants all of us to experience with Him. God is personally invested in your marriage.

And that, Charisa and Peter, is what gives us confidence in the marriage vows you are about to take. Almost more than any other couple I know, the two of you have more *specific* ideas for what your married life will be like: learning this language, moving to this other country, having kids in that time frame, engaging with that kind of poverty. Your specificity makes me nervous.

But, one of the themes in your relationship, it seems, is how you navigate the surprises that come up on your journey. When you met, Charisa, you offered to walk Peter to Chinatown for his next meeting, but Peter, you were the one to find your way around because Charisa didn't know where she was going. A surprise on the journey. And when Drew and Sherly got married, Charisa, even though you were Peter's guest, you stepped in and took care of the sound. A surprise on the journey. And of course, there was your engagement. Peter had picked out a place on a cliff over the ocean that was too windy that day. So Drew found another place. He laid a trail of red roses on a trail neither of you knew. You both followed it to a place neither of you had known before, sheltered in the trees, decorated with stargazer lilies – one of Charisa's favorite flowers. Surprises on the journey. But because you have been journeying with Jesus already, he gives you strength to handle surprises well.

That's good, because marriage can be fraught with hard times, where Charisa, you may think, 'What has Peter got me into this time???' or where Peter, you may find that your very optimistic bride got lost navigating for the both of you...again!! This journey involves disappointment and failure, and certainly coming to an end of ourselves. This, too, will be your journey with each other, and with Jesus.

A friend of mine once joked that wedding vows ought to read, 'Even though we're pretty young, and even though we've been on our best behavior throughout our courtship, and even though we have no idea how bad things can *really* get, I promise to love you, to be faithfully committed to you, and to put you at least as high as me if not higher, day after day, until one of us is dead.' That is a long journey of surprises. It is why many of us in this room and in this generation are afraid of marriage. The surprises can be too intense.

But you are placing the journey of your marriage into the context of a larger journey with Jesus, where you're headed to a larger wedding with him. You are embarking on a new part of *the same journey* on which you've already been. And you will discover that as you rely on Jesus to make this marriage work, that you are being refined not just for the other person, but for Jesus. All of your giving and receiving and adjusting to the other person, and learning for the other person's sake, acknowledging wrong and extending forgiveness to the other person, is ultimately preparing you *for someone else*. For you, and for those of us who have eyes to see it, Jesus is walking with you, leading you down a trail you do not know, leaving roses along the way, until you arrive in another beautiful place, sheltered from the winds, which opens up into an event much like this one, but far more glorious. You may not always know the trail, but you know where you are going. And you know the one who walks with you both: Jesus. We entrust you to him. We bless you in his name. And we celebrate your wedding for *your* sake, yes, but also for *ours*, because at this moment, you give us a hint of, a shadow of, a window into, the wedding that he calls us *all* to attend. God bless you.