

Alex & Susan's Wedding Homily: Jesus Makes Marriages Even Better Over Time

John 2:1 – 3, 6 – 11

Order of Service

Prelude

Parents Enter

Lighting of the Candles

Bridal Party Enters

Bridal March

Welcome and Call to Worship (Mako)

Who gives this woman to be married to this man? [Susan's dad: Her mother and I do.] Please have a seat.

This is a day of celebration. Alex and Susan desire to honor Jesus with their lives individually and now together. So we are gathered here in the sight of the God whom Alex and Susan worship, to witness the joining together of Alex and Susan in holy marriage. In the Christian story, marriage was instituted by this God in creation, honored by our Lord Jesus at the wedding at Cana, and strengthened by Jesus in his redemption. It is therefore, not to be entered into unadvisedly, but reverently, and in awe of God. Into this holy bond Alex and Susan come now to be joined.

Declaration of Intent (Young)

Prayer of Blessing (Mako)

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we stand here with Alex and Susan, our beloved friends, to witness the moment where they offer their two lives to You, for You to bind together as one. We celebrate with them the journey that has led them here to this moment and this day. We are grateful for the chance to be a part of their love story, but also to get a glimpse of a larger story unfolding here. Thank You for being the very source of human love, and of course, in particular, their love. We ask for a greater glimpse of You here. I ask that You would bless Alex and Susan. By the power of your Spirit, Lord Jesus, bind them together by your personal investment in their oneness. As you have become one with them individually, so hold them together in oneness with yourself. In your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Worship Song (Mako)

Alex and Susan invite us all now to worship the God to whom they are giving the rest of their lives. The song Joyful, Joyful in English is in your red hymnals as Hymn 611. The Korean translation will be up on the screen. Just a word of explanation of what worship is. Worship is a way we as humans can participate in something happening within God all the time. Within God, the Father adores the Son, and the Son adores the Father, and their love is the Holy Spirit between them. Worship is when we participate in adoring God and not ourselves, but we open ourselves up to God loving us.

Scripture Reading: Susan and Alex's friends Jen, Jenny, and Steph will now read the Scripture that they have chosen.

¹ On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; ² and both Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' ⁴ Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. ⁵ Jesus said to them, 'Fill the waterpots with water.' So they filled them up to the brim. ⁶ And he said to them, 'Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.' So they took it to him. ⁷ When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, ⁸ and said to him, 'Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.' ⁹ This beginning of his signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

Homily

Alex and Susan, it's been an honor to have to watched your journey up to this amazing day. I'm sure that I speak for all of your friends when I say that your story has been a gripping, roller-coaster ride that has taken twists and turns, detours and bends, with a few head-scratching moments where you were wondering, 'Where do we go from here?' Some of us were wondering, too, 'Where are they going???' But today, you stand here before family, before friends, and before God to declare that from this day forward, your two lives are one in marriage. Now there are people here who know only one of you, or know a part of your story, so I'm going to tell a little bit of your story because your story reveals something about all our stories, and about God's story.

You two met in high school. Susan was in 9th grade. Alex was in 10th grade. Susan pointed her finger at Alex and looked strangely at him and said, 'I know this guy who looks exactly like you.' You two figured out that Susan knew Alex's younger brother Adam. Susan, your first real impression of Alex was that he had a series of crushes on Asian girls. A friend of yours warned you to stay away from him because he was flirtatious. But because you became part of a group of friends, you did bump into each other.

Alex, your impression of Susan was that she was a tomboy, and a bit flirtatious herself. You felt like she was different from the other girls you knew: fun, and easy to hang out with because Susan liked joking around. Both of you said that there was some weirdness to your friendship. Susan, you felt like Alex would be nice to you one day and then ignore you the next day. Alex, you felt the same way about Susan. Susan, you said that in hindsight you had a crush on Alex but you would never have admitted it to yourself or others. Alex, you said that it just felt strange! So things might have started there between you, but Alex and his family moved away to Florida. Susan, you suggested that you keep in touch by writing letters. So the two of you wrote hand-written letters to each other. And that lasted through Alex's senior year of high school and part of his freshman year of college. And so began a time when you learned to be friends, one of the most touching parts of your history. In fact, sometime in there, you two made some kind of acknowledgement that you liked each other.

Until Susan started to date someone else. But that ended, and after Susan's freshman year in college, Susan threw out to Alex a job offer she knew of: teaching summer school to kids at her aunt's church. Alex said ok. So that summer you worked together teaching kids. And you saw things in each other again, but this time from a more mature standpoint. Susan, Alex said you were coming out of your emotional shell. He saw a more mature person who was able to be vulnerable. Alex, Susan said that she really enjoyed how you read the book *The Shack* and wanted to talk about it, about how it impacted your faith, about why it was heart wrenching for you. Also, Alex, Susan said you were good with kids and had a great sense of humor. You let them make fun of you. And you spent a lot of time with her family, which was really important to her. So after that summer, Alex started liking Susan again, but didn't want to go there again. You said, Alex, that it had to be her. So at the end of the summer, Alex, you had a dream that Susan asked you out. Which you told her about! Susan said, 'Hey, I don't think you should tell me that kind of thing.' Alex, you asked her whether she had feelings, and Susan turned around and started running away. Alex caught up. You talked. You discovered it was mutual. And you started dating. Susan, you weren't sure how to tell your sister that you and Alex were dating, so Alex told her.

And that has been so much of what has characterized your relationship – awkward moments, maturing together, Susan running ahead and Alex catching up. But at the same time, you've both had a growing love for Jesus and his healing and transforming love for people. Something that started with flirtatiousness became something else – deeper, involving more people, involving more of yourselves.

It's been an exciting process, this moving from two lives to becoming one. Until here you are, ready to be married. You are here, drawn together by all the ways that your two lives have been joined together in part, to join all of yourselves together in full.

At the same time you know it has not all been easy. In my experience, the two of you are more opposite each other than most couples I know. You have had to answer hard questions and to learn to answer them together. Will Susan really be emotionally present and emotionally vulnerable to Alex? And will Alex feel like he's always chasing after Susan? I was struck the time after graduation when the two of you were in Korea expecting to teach English together. You hoped you would finally be not long distance dating. But Susan suddenly got a teaching job back to Atlanta; so she came back here, leaving Alex in Korea. Then, when Alex came back to Atlanta, Susan left a couple

months later to start a teaching program in Boston! Alex, I think you've felt that on a different level as Susan engages with people or ideas or books that motivate her – and can you keep up with that? At different points in your relationship you have asked yourselves and each other, 'What if it just takes too much energy to hang in there with this other person?' Susan and Alex, you will surely feel the weight of that question again. So what gives you the confidence to say that not only will your relationship still be *good* twenty years from now, but that it will be *better*?

The Scripture we've read helps us understand this. 'And on the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and Jesus was also invited, and his disciples, to the wedding. And when the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.'

That is what it is like to run out of resources. In the Middle East and in the first century, when you threw a wedding, your wedding celebration would last for a few days, perhaps a week. So you'd put in a lot of preparation, kind of like today but times seven! People would come from miles around, and often the whole village would celebrate with you. In this culture, hospitality was everything. So you'd make sure you had enough good food, and most importantly, enough good wine. It would be embarrassing to run out.

Apparently, Mary the mother of Jesus was partly responsible for overseeing all the details at this wedding, so when the wine runs out she's worried. She comes to Jesus and says, 'They have no wine.' First of all, we might ask, 'Why should Jesus care? And why should we care? Why are we told about this quiet little miracle at a small town wedding?' Because weddings celebrate two becoming one. And God Himself wants to be ONE with each and every person who has ever lived.

Why? Because in the human body of Jesus, God has already married together divine nature and human nature. Jesus joined God's loving nature and humanity's corrupted, selfish nature in his own body. But at what cost? Through the long struggle of his life, Jesus bent his human nature back into alignment with the love of God. He killed its resistance through his death and raised up a God-soaked, God-drenched new humanity in his own resurrected body. He perfected the marriage of those two natures, and now he shares his Spirit of his new, God-drenched humanity with anyone who asks. Why? So he can be one with us, and start healing us of the same deep problem that we have. Human marriage is a metaphor for the oneness Jesus wants us to experience with him. This means that Jesus is personally invested in each and every marriage that has ever happened, or will happen. He cares how the marriage goes! He cares about your marriage, just like he cared about this one.

So what does Jesus do at this little wedding in Cana? He tells the servants to fill up these huge water vessels – 20 or 30 gallons each! With water. Then he tells them to bring some to the steward to taste. And when the steward tasted them, he tasted not water, but wine. And not only wine, but excellent wine – about 200 gallons of the finest wine. It's an acted metaphor. Just as Jesus took what is ordinary – human nature – into himself, and pours out his new human nature by his Spirit, so he takes ordinary water into these jars and pours out new wine, amazing wine. And the steward is so surprised at how good the wine is that he half admires the groom and half thinks he's crazy. 'Everyone else brings out the good stuff first, but you have saved the best for last! Do you really know what you're doing???'

Jesus doesn't just make ordinary wine, he makes excellent wine. In fact, it's better than the wine before. Most grooms in that day would serve good wine at the beginning of the banquet when everyone's taste buds are fresh, but after folks had drank some, they became less discriminating, so they'd bring the cheap stuff out.

Alex and Susan, you know that a lot of relationships and marriages start off this way. In the beginning, the groom and bride show their best side to each other. In the beginning, they treat each other with all kinds of tenderness. But later, their emotional resources run out. The pursuit gets old. The romantic fantasies wear thin. No one ever intends for this to happen, but it does, doesn't it? Things become routine, life exerts its demands, and what once felt like charming little character flaws are now huge glaring weaknesses designed especially to annoy you personally. Then work or children or ministry to certain people take up your energy; and when you get home, you begin to bring out the cheap stuff. This is what I have leftover at the end of the day: the cheap stuff. This is all I have left over after five years of marriage to you: the cheap stuff.

This is why many people in this room are afraid of marriage. We're afraid of being in a situation where our resources run out and it becomes painfully clear, by the disappointment etched on the face of our spouse, that all we

have left is cheap stuff. Marriage exposes us. It's a miracle if a marriage gets better over time. If anything, we're more confident that over time it'll go flat like old soda.

But that's not what Jesus wants for us. Jesus wants to help you make your marriage get better every year. Jesus wants you to see more deeply into each other, and in the midst of ups and downs, love and cherish each other more deeply with every passing season.

So how will that be true for the two of you? Susan and Alex, you are fun people, but what is it that will make your marriage last, and not only last, but get better? It's not that you have good intentions; everyone has good intentions. It's not strong feelings; feelings come and go. It's not Alex's ability to just put his head down and work hard, like when you kept playing soccer on a broken foot. Nor is it Susan's ability to just float above life with her head in the clouds. It's because of Jesus.

Susan and Alex, Jesus has been healing and transforming you from within. He has taken what is ordinary in you and, by placing his Spirit in you, is changing it into something extraordinary. You know that because the key moments in your courtship have been the times when you saw Jesus in the other person. Alex, Jesus gave you the patience and perspective you needed when Susan came back up to Boston. And you've discovered that Susan loves meeting new people and learning new ideas. When you engage with the people and ideas and books that matter to Susan, even though you're an introvert and that's not your favorite way of learning, it's a great gift to her. It's also a gift from Jesus to you. Susan, you discovered that when you slow down, let Jesus shape your emotional life, and invite Alex to be a part of that, it's a great gift to him, and to you. Each of you feels not that competent in these areas, and yet the other person feels more connected to you when you grow in it. We've seen what can happen when you bring your personalities and passions and limitation to Jesus, to allow him to use and fill out and make even richer.

And this is what Jesus will continue to do for you as you enter into this marriage, turning your natural passions and concerns, and even the limitations of your relationship, into extraordinary full-bodied wine. Jesus wants both of you, ten to twenty to thirty years from now, to be able to say to the other, 'I feel like you saved the best for later. When I married you, I knew you in part, and I loved you in part. But, I've seen that our relationship is more full, full of love for each other and for others beyond.' Jesus will make this true for you because he is already addressing the fundamental human nature problem in each of you. We've seen him doing it. You've seen him do it. Jesus takes what is ordinary and common and transforms it into vintage wine. In fact, I think this is why Jesus used wine: Wine is one of the few things known to us that can actually get better over time. It's a symbol of what we all long for.

So my encouragement to you is this: Continue to allow Jesus to heal and transform you by his Spirit dwelling in you. For he has been at work joining you to each other. He wants to continue, even more than you do. In the years to come, we expect to be very blessed through you.

Exchange of Vows (Rev. Young)

Alex and Susan will now say their personal vows, and then the traditional vows.

Groom: 'I Alex, take you Susan, to be my wedded wife, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health, to love and to cherish as long as we both shall live. For where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.'

Bride: 'I Susan, take you Alex, to be my wedded husband, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness or in health, to love and to cherish as long as we both shall live. For where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.'

Exchange of Rings (Mako)

May I have the rings. [receive rings] The exchanging of the rings expresses the couple's promise of faithfulness to each other. The unending circle of the ring is a symbol of eternity. Each ring is the outward expression of the inward bond, as two hearts unite as one, promising to love each other faithfully.

Groom: 'Susan, I give you this ring as a symbol of our vows, and with all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. With this ring, I thee wed.'

Bride: 'Alex, I give you this ring as a symbol of our vows, and with all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. With this ring, I thee wed.'

Prayer of Blessing (Mako)

Declaration of Marriage (Rev. Young)

Lighting of Unity Candle, Honoring of Parents (music)

Benediction, Charge and Blessing (Rev. Young)

Presentation of the Couple (Mako): Alex and Susan Chung

Recessional

Postlude