

## **Phil and Amy's Wedding Homily: Jesus Makes Marriages Even Better Over Time**

John 2:1 – 11

### *Order of Service*

Prelude

Parents Enter (Canon in D)

Lighting of the Candles (Canon in D)

Bridal Party Enters (Canon in D)

Bridal March (Jesu Joy of Man's Desiring)

### **Welcome**

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

Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of the God whom Phil and Amy worship, and in the presence of these witnesses, to witness the joining together of Phil and Amy in holy marriage. 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, discreetly, and in the fear of God. Into this holy bond Philip and Amy come now to be joined.

### **Prayer of Blessing**

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we stand here with Phil and Amy, 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 Phil and Amy. 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**

Phil and Amy invite us all now to worship the God to whom they have already given their lives, to whom they are giving the rest of their lives. The hymn they have chosen is found on your program.

Scripture Reading: Amy and Phil's dear friend Carla will now read the Scripture that they have chosen.

<sup>1</sup> On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; <sup>2</sup> and both Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup> When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does that have to do with us? My hour has not yet come.' <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, 'Whatever he says to you, do it.' <sup>6</sup> Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to them, 'Fill the waterpots with water.' So they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> And he said to them, 'Draw some out now and take it to the headwaiter.' So they took it to him. <sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> 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.' <sup>11</sup> This beginning of his signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

### **Homily**

Amy and Phil, it's been an honor to have watched your journey through friendship 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, fairy-tale-like, roller-coaster ride that has spanned four continents and touched people all over the world. 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 at MIT's Asian Christian Fellowship when Phil was a junior and Amy was a freshman. Phil, your first impressions were that Amy is a good listener, thoughtful, insightful, and enthusiastic. Amy, your first impressions were that Phil was serious and deeply thoughtful under a layer of shyness. You wondered, 'Why does Phil drive to a mountaintop and camp there just to relax?' You soon discovered that you had a few things in common; your spiritual lives with Jesus; and ballroom dancing. It was in January of 2004 that you, Amy talked Phil through some pictures of a conference you had went to called Urbana, and shared about wanting to go abroad and serve there. Phil had already been planning to go to China in the summer of 2004. When you two prayed about that, Amy, your hope and enthusiasm touched Phil's heart, and he started liking you.

In the spring, Phil, you invited Amy to a semi-formal dinner hosted by your fraternity, and you made your move. You confessed your feelings to Amy, and in the words of your wedding website, 'Amy flat out rejected him.' She said, 'No. I see you as a friend.' Then, after two years of friendship, some ballroom dance lessons, a trip to California to climb Half Dome, Phil, you confessed your resurgent feelings to Amy, and she once again said, 'No. I see you as a friend.' Then, after another six months, after some encouragement from others, Phil, you gave Amy a Christmas present – a book with a note inside where you confessed to Amy a third time – and she said, 'No.'

But, Amy, something in you recognized that you and Phil had the same values and goals in life. At around this time, you remember saying to a friend that you'd probably wind up marrying Phil because of that connection. So Amy, you told Phil that you were open to hanging out and getting to know each other more as friends. And while you were doing that, you discovered that Phil could disagree with you, and also that he could really encourage you. In this case, he encouraged you to do what was in your heart: to explore Jesus' mission overseas in areas of health and development. While you were driving back from Munhee's wedding, the phone rang and the opportunity to go to Calcutta, India came, and Phil was excited for you. That meant a lot to you. But it was when Phil went to India and got involved in a Christian microenterprise business and community working with women rescued from sex slavery that you saw him come alive. Amy, you admired Phil's passion, depth, and pursuit of Jesus' purposes, and that made you finally say, 'Yes.' In another few months, in October of 2007, Amy, you finally acknowledged that you and Phil were indeed dating.

And that has been so much of what has characterized your relationship – traveling, uncertainty, and confusion. But at the same time, a deep commitment to Jesus and his healing and transforming love for people, even people far away who live very different lives. You've been brought together not so much out of an initial spark, or even your mutual love for ballroom dancing, but sharing life values, admiring the other's devotion to Jesus and openness to his Spirit living in you, and being willing to risk your very lives for that which matters most to each of you.

It's been an exciting process, this moving from two lives to becoming one. You have enjoyed finally being able to hold hands. You enjoyed the Perspectives on Christian Mission class. You've enjoyed going to Rwanda together. You've enjoyed a deepening appreciation for the other person's struggles, your deepening emotional vulnerability, and your deepening agreement about serving other people together.

Until here you are, ready to be married. You want to take the other person's hand, saying that for the rest of your lives you will be my dance partner in life. 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. You have had to answer hard questions and to learn to answer them together. Will Amy really balance family and career? Will Phil really focus on real estate? Do you really understand where the other person is coming from? Do you respect how they make decisions? Can you really live overseas in places of poverty and raise a family there? 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?' Amy and Phil, 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 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 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, 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.

Phil and Amy, 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 and personally to annoy you. Then 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: the cheap stuff.

This is why a lot of people today feel uncertain about 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. That's why some people in this room are afraid of marriage. 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? Amy and Phil, you are fun and sincere 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 Phil's ability to bounce back from being rejected by Amy, nor is it Amy's ability to just work harder. It's because of Jesus.

Amy and Phil, 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: a time of prayer, a time of sharing Jesus' love with others. As you have given your lives to him, he has made each of you fuller, deeper, more wonderful than you were on your own. He has taken your enthusiasm, open-endedness, and even your mild commitment phobia, and he's healing and transforming you from within to be a vessel of his love. Phil, renting a house to a large family in need, and Amy, working for Partners in Health, are very respectable, but I'm more impressed that you've made personal sacrifices that hit you more deeply. Phil, the fact that you have been willing to turn off your cell phone and build boundaries into your life...and you, Amy, the fact that you were willing to stop out of medical school for a while if your committee didn't give you time off for this wedding to be with family and friends...those decisions reflect the love of Jesus as well, perhaps in your case most of all. We've seen Jesus take your great enthusiasm for the world in general and transform it into great love for people in particular.

And this is what Jesus will continue to do for you as you enter into this marriage with this particular person, 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, more 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. He will continue to 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 living in you. For he will join you to each other. Phil, when you feel like retreating into distractions, and Amy, when you feel not heard and frustrated, know that Jesus will strengthen you. Continue with him. We expect to be very blessed through you.

### **Exchange of Vows & Rings**

Phil and Amy will now say their personal vows, and then the traditional vows.

Groom: 'I Phil, take you Amy, 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.'

Bride: 'I Amy, take you Phil, 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.'

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: 'Amy, 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: 'Phil, 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.'

Phil and Amy will now light the unity candle.

Lighting of Unity Candle, Honoring of Parents

**Benediction**

Pray with me to bless this couple. May the love of God be above you to overshadow you, beneath you to uphold you, before you to guide you, behind you to protect you, close beside you and within you to make you able for all good things, and to reward your faithfulness with the joy and peace which the world cannot give. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom be glory now and evermore. Amen.

**Presentation of the Couple**

As we get ready to present the couple, I want to ask all of you to stay in your seat after the bridal party walk down the aisle. Phil and Amy would like to take a big group picture, so please stay where you are.

Now that Phil and Amy have given themselves to each other with vows of love and the giving and receiving of rings, before the Lord Jesus and these witnesses, I now pronounce that they are husband and wife, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Those whom God has joined together, let no one put asunder. Amen. Phil, you may kiss your bride! It is my great pleasure and privilege to introduce you for the first time: Mr. and Mrs. Philip and Amy Hou!

Recessional

Postlude