

שִׁימֵנִי כַּחֲתָם עַל-לִבֶּךָ



Set me as a seal upon Thine heart.

“The Seal of the Bride on the Heart of Her Bridegroom”
Song of Solomon 8:6b

Sermon on the Occasion of the Wedding of
Andrew Brian Ratcliffe & Angela Claire Russell

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Pastor Michael L. McCoy, Preaching

Our Redeemer Lutheran Church
Emmett, Idaho

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Ah, dearly beloved bride, you are absolutely radiant. White certainly befits you, as it conveys the message of holiness, purity and righteousness. If that smile of yours is a canticle of happiness, then your singing of the processional hymn of “Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers,” combined with the heavenly gift of music, most certainly is the song of songs. How beautiful you are, dear bride, perfectly attired for this joyful occasion and appearing here in the presence of your bridegroom. But alas, are you embarrassed by all of this attention directed to you? — and are you blushing because of all these truthful words spoken about you?

Alright then, ponder, for a moment, your beloved bridegroom. This one who dearly loves you is like a gazelle and behold, he has come to you, leaping over the rocky mountains and skipping over the hills (Song 2:8) to be here in this Valley of Plenty, in Emmett, the City of Truth (עֲמֵת), with you, this day. And what do you say now that he has arrived and come to be with you in this holy place and at this sacred time? Surely you have said, dear bride, these words –

Behold, the winter is past, the rain has passed, gone away. The blossoms have appeared in the land, the time of song has arrived, and the call of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree has ripened its fruits, and the vines are in blossom — they give off fragrance. Arise, my friend, my beauty, and come! My dove, in the clefts of the cliff, in a hiding place in the precipice, let me see your appearance, let me hear your voice, for your voice is pleasant, and your appearance is comely — (Song 2:10b-14).

Most certainly these have been your thoughts since the advent of your bridegroom and his appearance here with you. And what is said to you, dearly beloved bride, is also said to you, Angie, and to you, Andrew, as well as to each of you individual souls here this afternoon. The Church is the Bride of Christ and the Son of God came from heaven to call her to Himself. Therefore, in truth, this Word is intended for all who are gathered here this day in the Presence of Jesus, the Heavenly Bridegroom – whether you are a member of the Family of God, which is the Church on her way to heaven, or you are a privileged guest who may not have another opportunity to hear the Word that brings forgiveness, eternal life and salvation.

That being so, ponder the cost for this day! Or, do you think it quite tacky to consider the costs on a day like this - for a day like this? Assuredly, most assuredly, we ought not cast away the thoughts of the cost for you to be here, dear bride. The cost is one of blood, sweat and tears, and your bridegroom would have you know the price paid for you to be dressed in the white wedding dress and abiding in his presence. Blood, sweat and tears. Do you not know of these things, beloved Bride?

Of Blood? The Blood of Jesus was shed for the remission of all sins, of each soul here, including everyone of your sins of thought, word and deed from the first beat of your heart to the last, whenever that may be. Christ died for you, whether you believe it or not. Remember, however, this Divine, Blood-bought salvation does you no good unless faith trusts such Word of God. The Blood of the Bridegroom enables you, dear Bride, to be dressed in the white, pure, holy righteousness of Christ.

O redeemed one, you sang of this . . .

From heav'n He came and sought her,
To be His holy Bride;
With His own Blood He bought her,
And for her life He died.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 473, stanza 1)

Of Sweat? Whether you are a Christian believer or a non-Christian unbeliever, Jesus has worked and accomplished what you could never earn for yourself - Heaven for all eternity. Forgiveness forever. Life in Paradise. Faith believes this Good News and receives the benefits of it. You are justified – you are right with God, not by your works, but by His grace through faith in Christ. Here, dear soul, is Love that is stronger than death (*Song 8:6b*) for Jesus has died in your place and defeated death in your stead by rising again on Easter morning. You shall never perish, for your Redeemer protects and defends you with love that burns with the holy flame of the LORD God (*Song 8:6c*). And even though there are those who hate you, dear bride, – foes from the outside who seek to destroy you and traitors from within bent on setting you aflame with the false doctrines and practices of men and demons, fear not. Your Bridegroom guides and guards you against such wicked ones as you have just confessed when you sang . . .

The Church shall never perish!
Her dear Lord, to defend,
To guide, sustain, and cherish,
Is with her to the end.
Tho' there be those that hate her,
False sons within her pale,
Against both foe and traitor,
She ever shall prevail.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 473, stanza 3)

And of Tears? Jesus wept for those who were rejecting Him and cried out from the cross, petitioning His Father in heaven to forgive those responsible for His crucifixion – namely, you and me. The floods of the earth will not be able to extinguish the Love that the Lord has for you (*Song 8:7a*). In fact, the waters of the earth, touched by the tears of Jesus, are now combined with the Word of God in Baptism, granting the cleansing of Christ and the regeneration of the soul. Indeed, . . .

The Church's One Foundation,
Is Jesus Christ, her Lord,

She is His new creation,
By water and the Word.

(The Lutheran Hymnal, 473, stanza 1)

Andrew and Angie, you have come here to bear public confession of the Christian faith and to pledge your promises to one another in marriage before many witnesses. You have determined to enter into vocations of husband and wife – one to the other. Marriage is an estate of serving the other – of being *subject to one another out of fear of Christ (Ephesians 5:21)*. These matters of service belong to the Law and no one keeps the Law perfectly.

Andrew, you are to love Angie just *as Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, that He might present the Church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:25-27)*. Andrew, this you will not be able to do. No matter. This is what you are expected to do, so do it. It is not optional. Jesus expects you to love Angie just as He has loved His Church.

Angie, you are to be subject to your husband just *as the Church is subject to Christ (Ephesians 5:24)*. You are to be subject to Andrew just as the Church earnestly rejoices at being subject to Christ. Angie, this you will not be able to do. No matter. This is what you are expected to do, so do it. It is not optional. Jesus expects you this of you.

Where you, Andrew, and where you, Angie, and where both of you fail miserably and fall short of God's Divine expectation of the Law, then *confess your sins to one another and pray for one another (James 5:16)*, for surely the Lord will answer the prayers of His people who petition Him to forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. It is of benefit to practice such confession of sins, announcing of God's forgiveness and being reconciled to one another, for you will surely need to extend such a practice in your marriage and when, and if, God grants you children and you are faced with the trials, struggles, temptations and tears that come with being parents – providing for each of your children until he, she or they depart from your household and go out on their own. Confession of sins. Forgiveness. Absolution. Reconciliation. These the faithful Christian does, gives and receives. Surely God rejoices when His people make use of His gifts that He earned and accomplished in His Incarnation, Life, Death, Resurrection Ascension, and reigning at the Right Hand of God. Surely this pleases the Lord to do this – to forgive and to be forgiven.

Therefore, dear Bride, you are here and you petition your Bridegroom with the words, *Set me as a seal upon Thine heart (Song 8:6a)*. You ask Him to imprint your image upon His heart. Surely He has done this, as the nail-prints in His hands proclaim. This has been done and, indeed, *It is finished (John 19:30)*. So, even before you can say, *Set me as a seal upon Thine heart*, it is already done. He has already loved you and has already died for you and has already rose again for you and has given you all things. And yet you say, *Set me as a seal upon Thine heart*.

To what can we liken this? Perhaps this. It is like the love that Andrew already has for you, Angie. He who dearly loves you is like a long-legged gazelle and behold, he has come to you, flying over the Rocky Mountains and driving down Freezeout Hill to be here in this Valley of Plenty, in Emmett, the City of Truth, with you, this day. Standing tall, he enters the sanctuary of Our Redeemer and waits for you to come down the aisle. He receives your hand and, together, you stand in the Presence of the Lord and declare your promises in the presence of many witnesses. And you say, *Set me as a seal upon thine heart*. And Andrew will say, "Angie, receive this ring as a pledge and token of wedded love and faithfulness."

This is the Seal of the Bride on the Heart of Her Bridegroom and "*for this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*" Behold, dear redeemed, *this is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:31-32)*.

Therefore, let the Church sing the last two stanzas of the sermon hymn as she lives her life in this world, remaining faithful amidst toil and tribulation, her longing eyes always yearning for and awaiting the Day when the heavenly Bridegroom will escort His Bride to the great Wedding Feast in heaven - in the Name of the Father and of the † Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.