

Song of Songs 5:16

March 25, 2006 – WEDDING: William Bunde – Marie Baertsh

Pastor Mark A. Cordes

God Bless You with Love and Friendship✠ **From God**✠ **For each other**

In the name of Jesus, our heavenly Bridegroom, dear Bride of Christ, Bill and Marie:

When I agreed to Bill's request to preach on these few words from Song of Songs, I did not realize that this would require reading eight chapters of difficult Hebrew and nearly 100 pages of a commentary which identifies the Song of Songs as "the most challenging book in the Bible."¹ It's safe to say this if every congregation President gave his Pastor such an "added challenge" for his wedding text.... well, let's put it this way: One of the church fathers named Bernard of Clairvaux preached 86 sermons on this Song without completing chapter 2. Since yours is 5:16, we should have you married sometime late in May.

What makes the Song of Songs so challenging is illustrated in two major translations. The older one on your bulletin says, "*This is my beloved, and this is my friend.*" (KJV) More recently we have, "*This is my lover, this is my friend.*" (NIV) Back in 1611, the King James translators were following the centuries old interpretation that this was purely allegorical, Christ the heavenly Bridegroom with His holy bride, the Church. In our sexually explicit age, many commentators have gone to the opposite extreme of finding details like an X-rated movie out of ancient Israel. But if you two were driving in the county on a one-lane road, which would be better, to go into the ditch on the right or the left? Clearly the middle of the road is where the Holy Spirit is taking us today. Your loved ones and I will take the part of the friends in this Song and pray: **God Bless You with Love and Friendship**, first of all...

✠ **From God**

For many centuries the only interpretation of Solomon's Song of Songs was the allegorical picture of Christ and His Church. This may seem especially strange when you realize that the height of its popularity was the age of asceticism when hermits went off to live a celibate life alone. They saw in the Song the most vibrant relationship possible with Christ as their heavenly Bridegroom.

And it is a beautiful picture and mystery beyond our ability to express. When we pray today that you may be blessed **with Love and Friendship From God**, we're hoping that God will use your life together to draw you closer to Himself. Our marriage by faith to Christ is totally lopsided. We bring to His altar nothing but all our heart-aches and misfortunes, our sins, misery and sorrow. He is the eternal light, we the eternal darkness; he the life, we death; he the righteousness, we the sin. We have to wonder why God would want us at all when at our best we cannot shake the selfishness that ruins every human relationship if left untreated. But what does the bridegroom do? Christ is so intensely in love with His bride that He will not live with her until He gives her the most beautiful makeover. It's from the inside out as the Lord's Apostle Paul teaches us in Titus 3:5-7: "*He gave his tender body unto death for them through the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Spirit.*" Christ instituted a washing called Baptism by which He purifies His bride of all sin. And He gives her His holy Word to accept in faith as she becomes His glorious bride. The bridegroom comes with all His treasures; but I come with all my sins, with all my misery and grief. Yet because this is a marriage-union, in the sense that we become one flesh with God, (Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5), we leave our father and mother, our earthly families, and cleave to one another. Christ and His bride should embrace each other and not disown one another, although one is even a little sick and awkward; for what concerns one, the other must also bear.

¹ Brug, John F. *Commentary on Song of Songs*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publishing House, 1995, p. 5.

Christ became man for us. He united our human nature to Himself to help us see His good will toward us. Now as the bride loves her betrothed, so also Christ loves us; and we love him as no one else. The bride can be satisfied by nothing except the bridegroom Himself; as she says in the Song of Solomon: ***“My beloved is mine, and I am his.”*** (2:16) She cannot rest until she has her beloved Himself. And Christ will have me only and nothing besides. If I gave him all I have, it would be of no use to Him. He wants my whole heart. He demands, that I say from the bottom of my heart: “Take me. I’m yours.” This marriage-union is accomplished by faith, so that I rely fully and freely on Him as my Lord and Savior. If I only have Christ, what more can I desire? My death vanishes in His life, my sins in His righteousness and my condemnation in His salvation. Now since my sin, my filth is taken away, Christ must give me a makeover of His eternal righteousness. With all His grace I become His beautiful bride.

✝ For each other

Bill and Marie, that is the heart of your wedding text. When the woman sees her man coming, she says with all her heart: ***“This is my beloved, my lover, and this is my friend.”*** Of the many kinds of love, none is so warm as a bride’s love, especially a new bride for her bridegroom, and on the other hand, the bridegroom’s love for his bride. True love wants nothing of pleasures or presents, riches or gold, but cares only for **each other**. “I want only you,” she says to him, and he to her. And if they have nothing but **each other**, it’s okay, because that is all their desire. That is the true nature of wedding love.

And this is what we pray for you when we ask God to **Bless You with Love and Friendship For each other**. But sadly, you won’t learn this from Hollywood or even Solomon in his life. Since 1000 B.C. everyone recognizes this royal Son of King David as the author of the Song of Songs. Many exotic Hebrew words aren’t found anywhere else in the Bible but seem to come from all over the world where Solomon’s men traded during the height of Israel’s prosperity and wealth beyond imagination.

But what Solomon could not buy was love. He violated the LORD’s command through Moses that the Israelites’ king ***“must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold.”*** (Deuteronomy 17:17 NIV) Solomon did both until he had 1,000 wives and concubines, servant wives. And just as God had warned, ***“His wives led him astray”*** (1 Kings 11:3) to worship their idols and even sacrifice children in the fire. His is a hideous history.

Yet the old king seems to have come to his senses near the end of his life. It appears the Holy Spirit inspired Solomon to interject himself as a narrator-observer in self-depreciation. We don’t know historical details behind the Song. The husband and wife may be ideals of love in ancient Jewish poetry. But I can’t help wondering if Solomon was looking for one more wife when he found the Shulammitte whose love for just one man, her husband, was all she wanted and not Solomon’s wealth at all.

The fact is that for you two to have this beautiful, lasting **Love and Friendship For each other**, you need to keep in mind a line from our wedding service twenty-five years ago this spring: “And though by reason of sin, many a cross has been laid upon this estate, yet our heavenly Father will not forsake His children in their time of need.” Think of your marriage like an isosceles triangle, equal on all sides with Christ as the Head. The closer you come to Him, the closer you will come to each other. And when you find yourselves growing apart from each other, look to Him in His Word and sacraments. Then Christ, your heavenly Bridegroom, will draw you closer to Himself and to each other with His forgiving love.

What Christ gives us is completely and totally Himself. He does not cut off a piece and give me tiny crumbs. He does not give little drops of dew from the water of life. He gives us the entire fountain of His wisdom. If He gave me only a little brook, just part of His wisdom, righteousness and life, I would say to my heavenly Bridegroom, “Jesus, that is no use to me. I want all of you. Without you nothing is real or true, loving or fine, warm and tender as only you can be to me.” Bill and Marie, in Christ’s love you will find the greatest **Love and Friendship**. May God give you all of His **Love and Friendship** as His wedding present today. Amen.