

Nick and Johanna's Wedding Homily

27 May 2017

Order of Service

Prelude

Groom's Party Enters (from side)

Groom's Parents Enter (from back)

Bride's Mom and Brother Enter (from back)

Flower Girl (from back)

Bridesmaids Enter (from back)

Bride Enters (from back): Who gives this woman to be married to this man? 'We do'

Welcome and Call to Worship

This is a day of celebration. We are gathered here in the sight of the God whom Johanna and Nick worship, to witness the joining together of their two lives 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 Nick and Johanna come now to be joined.

Prayer of Blessing

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we stand here with Johanna and Nick, 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 Nick and Johanna. 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.

Homily

Nick and Johanna, all of us have waited a long time for this day. It is incredibly fun to be here in the Boston area with you. Many of the people in this room know your relationship from when you were becoming true friends at Boston College. A few people here know you guys from the time you were in the same youth group in high school in Shanghai. 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.

Nick and Johanna met when Nick was in 9th grade and Johanna was in 6th grade. They were at the same K-12 school in Shanghai, and at the same church. It was the time that the Christian worship song 'Hosanna' was really popular. So Nick, you and some friends decided to change the words of 'Hosanna' to 'Johanna.' Johanna, you were not impressed, nor were you comfortable with that. The two of you did not become friends back then. Nick, when you graduated from high school and were coming out to Boston College, you shared that you'd like to believe that God was calling you to Boston, even though you were not looking forward to it.

By contrast, Johanna, three years later, when you decided to come to Boston College also, you were really looking forward to the adventure. But when you got here, you felt really homesick for your family and friends in Shanghai, and also your missions experience in Cambodia. I remember meeting with you early your freshman year and you saying, 'I just want to get through college.' You saw Nick again at the Christian fellowship you also became part of. And this time, you felt like you could connect with him because he also didn't like BC at first, but he had come to like it, because he had come to see how Jesus was with him here. You also noticed that other people respected Nick and trusted him, as he was a leader in the fellowship; he interacted with people in a way you thought you could learn from. And most of all, he was a friend from home. He was someone familiar. But Nick pointed you to Jesus and to new things.

Meanwhile, Nick, your mutual friend Sarah Joo asked you, 'What do you think about Johanna?' Nick, you replied, 'That's crazy. She's just a freshman, and she's more like a little sister.' But the seed got planted in your mind. Nick, at the same time, you were also talking with friends about BC professor Kerry Cronin's challenge to actually go on a date. And you were hanging out with Johanna pretty regularly. So, you finally asked Johanna out on the very last week of school that year. And you wondered, could anything happen?

That summer, the two of you were in Shanghai, and during a two week period, you met up once, then a second time, then a third time. The third time, Johanna, you went to Nick's house, and you two had lunch with Nick's mom at a Thai restaurant down the street. Nick realized then two things about Johanna. First, Johanna got along really easily with your mom, and you realized how important that was to you. Nick, you saw how Johanna's easy-going, flexible and friendly personality wasn't just that she was low maintenance and easily satisfied by a lot of things, but because she was so glad to participate in what other people want to do, like play strategy games with your friends or be so kind to your mom. She entered into a dynamic that was familiar to you. But Johanna pointed you to new things. Johanna shared about her passion to do work in Cambodia out of a love for Jesus and a love for adventure, for new people, new food, and new experiences. Nick, you really started to wonder if this was going to happen.

But Johanna, you were oblivious to all the clues that Nick was dropping. Nick asked Clement to pick you up from the airport and he asked you, 'What about dating Nick?' Nick g-chatted you, and asked you about being an RA in a dorm. Nick even sent you his baby pictures. Johanna, I don't know how much more obvious Nick could be. Whatever other pretense he put up, he was also asking, 'Do you want children that might look like this?' Then, Nick came to Boston the weekend before school started. He asked to meet with you, Johanna. And that night, a very nervous Nick did not say, 'I have these feelings for you. This is why I like you.' No. Instead, Nick just cut to the practical issue, 'Do you want to start a dating relationship?' Johanna, two weeks later, you said, 'No.'

Nick, you were leaving that afternoon back to New York. But Clement, Angela, and Susan told you to skip your bus, go back to BC, and tell Johanna how you FEEL about her. So, you took Johanna on a long walk that afternoon for two hours. And she said, 'I'll think about it.' The two of you talked over the phone. You asked about each other's hopes and dreams, core values, and love for Jesus. So on October 28th, Johanna, you actually felt like you respected and liked Nick enough to say, 'Sure, why not!'

Many of us got to see your relationship from that point on. We saw Nick choose Boston for community, while Johanna considered going to Bulgaria and the Czech Republic to teach for the sense of adventure. We've watched you serve God and serve others together. We've seen your heart for God's mercy and justice grow. Then, there was one day we saw pop up on Facebook pictures from Shanghai, with Nick on one knee and Johanna looking a little embarrassed at how public this all was. Since then, you have been waiting for this day, your wedding.

The Bible 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. This is the Scripture you've chosen:

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.'

Like your wedding, this wedding will engage all of our senses. To help celebrate your wedding, you guys called for music. The ultimate wedding envisioned by Scripture is also heralded by music, the music of praise: 'And from the throne came a voice saying, 'Praise our God, all you His servants and all who fear Him, small and great.' You also called for friends and family to gather. This ultimate wedding also calls for a huge gathering: '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, 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, Johanna, 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 closeness of the closest friendships are expressed by eating together.

In this final wedding at the turning of the ages, the groom will be Jesus. The bride will be 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 in the sense that we will share in his healing of all creation. The one we have known in part, we will come to fully know. 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.

This is why Jesus cares about your marriage. In the view of Scripture, all human weddings are a pointer to 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.

And that, Johanna and Nick, is what gives us confidence in the marriage vows you are about to take. One of the themes in you individually, and in your relationship, it seems, is trusting Jesus with your future. Nick, you experienced that when you gave your high school graduation speech, not excited to come to Boston College, choosing to trust Jesus with your future, even if you weren't feeling it at the time. Johanna, you experienced that when you and Nick had your only real fight. Right at the time Nick moved from New York to Boston and made that transition with his job and friendships, you wondered if you wanted to go to Shanghai, after you visited old family friends, which reminded you of home. You wrote in your journal that as adventuresome as you are, you live in the past, you love home, you miss the familiar. But you chose to trust Jesus with your future, even though that was hard for you.

That's good, because in marriage, it's easy to blame the other person for changing what was familiar. Nick, you might wonder, 'What lower-income community does Johanna want to go to now?' Johanna, you might wonder, 'I thought you were going to make me feel like I was home.' Your journey will involve disappointment and failure, and certainly coming to an end of yourselves.

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 challenges. It is why many of us in this room and in this generation are afraid of marriage.

But you are placing 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 trust 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.

Jesus inhabits the familiar to point it to what he is doing, which is far deeper. Even in this passage. Jesus' return is called a wedding because a wedding is familiar to us. But the two of you becoming one points to a deeper two becoming one: the marriage of two natures in one person, divinity and humanity in Jesus himself, so that by joining us to himself by his Spirit, he can marry all creation to the God of love in all His fullness. We're familiar with a wedding dress. But yours, Johanna, points to a more wondrous type of wedding dress: Jesus clothing his people with the integrity that he has perfected for us, and shares with us, gleaming with glory. We're familiar with a party in a garden. But the sound of our laughter, that fountain, these leaves in the wind point to the joy, the sound of

many waters, the thunderpeals of all the skies which will celebrate Jesus heals us at last. You are both familiar with longing for a childhood that you can never have again. But your longing points you to the day Jesus says, 'Welcome home.'

For you, and for those of us who have eyes to see it, Jesus is here, inhabiting you, inhabiting your marriage, until the day you come to an event much like this one, but far more glorious. And even as you took a bit of a long walk to this garden, you are taking a long walk together with Jesus, each of you becoming more and more like him, so that you can point each other to Jesus, the one you will love for all eternity, the one who is always familiar and yet always new. So 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 point us to the wedding that he calls us all to attend. God bless you.

Exchange of Vows

Nick and Johanna will now say their vows.

Groom: 'I Nick, take you Johanna, 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 Johanna, take you Nick, 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.'

Exchange of Rings

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: 'Johanna, 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: 'Nick, 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.'

Benediction, Charge and Blessing:

'The Lord bless you, and keep you; the Lord make His face shine on you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance on you, and give you peace.' (Numbers 6:24 – 26) Now that Johanna and Nick have given themselves to Jesus and to one another in the presence of us as witnesses, with the exchanging of vows and rings, we now recognize that Nick and Johanna are husband and wife. What God has joined together, let no one separate. Nick, you may kiss your bride.

Presentation of the Couple: Mr. and Mrs. Nick and Johanna Tsaur
Recessional