

Homily for the Marriage of Eric Milner & Shannon Tucker

November 9, 2019

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To order coffee for my wife is an intricate and complicated affair. People who know Ardelle — and Shannon and Eric know her well — are surprised by this, as she's generally a pretty no-nonsense kind of gal. But I have seen a barista's Sharpie run completely dry as he tries to record her preferences on the side of the cup.

I happen to be ok with this, by the way. I mean, if you're paying...what... \$8.95 for a cup of coffee these days, the person preparing it should expect to be bothered at least a little.

Incidentally, I was once told that if your drink of choice is a decaf nonfat latte, you can just tell the barista you want a "Why bother?" and she'll know just what you mean.

Why bother? This is a question asked often enough of couples, straight or gay, who decide to get married. Why bother with marriage in this day and age? Especially if you're getting along quite well in your life together. Why bother?

And let's be clear. Eric and Shannon, everything about this splendid occasion announces that you have made quite a remarkable bother about it.

Earlier this week I was surprised to see these two at Wednesday night dinner here at Calvary. The mural room downstairs was bustling with people, young and old, loading our baked potatoes before we headed off to classes or yoga or handbells or choirs. And there were Eric and Shannon, as if it was just another Wednesday in their lives.

It made a little more sense when Shannon said they were there to receive the second shipment of flowers that had been flown in for the wedding. I think they'd just done the mental math when I saw them and realized that, instead of filling a couple of cargo planes, it would have been cheaper to charter a barge and bring the flowers up the Mississippi.

Most of you probably know that the resting expression on Eric's face says something like, "This room may not presently be on fire, but it could burst into flames at any second!"

And even if the room was actually on fire, Shannon would still be wearing a smile that's even bigger than his glasses and adding that signature little shrug that says, "Isn't he just the cutest thing you've ever seen in your whole life?!!!"

Well, those were basically the expressions they were wearing on Wednesday night. Just turned up to eleven.

Yes, my friends. You have made quite an incredible bother to make this day happen. And I'd like to be the first to say thank you. Thank you for bothering. Because this wedding is a wonderfully over the top announcement not only that your love for each other is worth the bother, but that we are too. Each one of us. Single or coupled. Young and old. Straight and gay. Black, and white, and brown.

The good news of marriage *as a sacrament* is not that the two people exchanging the vows get a spiritual supercharge to keep them true to their promises for the rest of their lives.

No, the good news of this sacrament is far bigger than that. It is that your marriage is an outward sign of God's promise that each one of us is worth bothering about. It is that even knowing what God knows about how we fall short of perfection and will keep on falling short into the future, we are still loved beyond measure by the Love who made us all.

Said another way, we believe the promises these two men will make to each other are glittering reflections of a divine promise of a love that will not let any of us go, for better for worse, for richer for

poorer, in sickness and in health. God thinks every one of us is worth bothering to love. And to believe this is to be transformed.

In our gospel lesson, Jesus did not add flower arrangements and choirs and vestments to the Law he lived by. Quite the opposite. The passage seems to be a decluttering of his religion that would make Marie Kondo shudder. Jesus seemed to sweep the whole of the Law right off the religious table, leaving only two items: Love God, and love your neighbor. The essence of why you and I and every last human being who's ever lived were put here, Jesus said, is to learn the way of love. The rest of our religion and the rest of our lives are really just fleeting, temporal decorations for these two abiding truths.

Now, some say it would follow that a wedding should be a simple and unadorned affair. But I'm not a complete idiot. That will not be the takeaway from this sermon tonight.

In fact, I'd like to argue the opposite. I'd argue that by crystalizing the whole of the life God calls us to into learning and deepening these two essential loves, Jesus has set before us a life that will require everything we have at our disposal. Because he's asking us to learn and to live out the way of love in all our relationships. Not just with spouses and families, but with strangers and aliens, prisoners and outcasts. Even, if you read the whole of our scriptures, even with creation itself.

For this kind of work, we will need to deploy all our resources — we will need beauty and wonder and art. We will need our minds and our affections. And most of all we will need one another. And the reason the way of love demands everything we have is because ever since that first couple covered their naked bodies and fled the garden in fear and shame we've each carried a suspicion that we're really just not worth the bother. Why would God bother to love the likes of us, knowing, as God does, the more unseemly contents of our hearts? Who would love any of us... if they only knew?

I feel this way at times. I'm a straight, middle class, white guy, and I can feel like I'm not worth the bother. Even if no one's ever told me that the way my heart is drawn to love deep down is categorically wrong.

If I can doubt my worthiness of love, what does it mean for a gay man of my generation to have been told a thousand times in a thousand ways, some of them violent, even fatal, that his love is illegitimate. What might it even mean for a gay man to grow up in this part of the world seeing hundreds, if not thousands of images of happy weddings in handsome old churches filled with flowers and choirs and prayers and joy, but not one with them of two men standing hand in hand at the altar?

I draw this distinction, not to wallow a little more in guilt about my own privilege. But rather to say an astonished thank you to the same sex couples who have claimed their place in this liturgy just as Eric and Shannon are doing today. Because there may be no more powerful expression of the extravagant good news of Christ in our world right now than a big fat gay wedding like this one. When the world keeps shouting a lesser gospel, it may take every bit of this brash and beautiful splendor for us to see that the wideness of God's mercy encompasses even you. Even me.

You see, Eric and Shannon, to the question, "Who does God find worth the bother of loving?" tonight you are answering in front of us all, "We are. Just as we are. And that God has bothered to love each of us is what gives us the courage to promise the daily bother of loving each other as long as we both shall live."

So, God bless you both for shipping in these flowers and hiring these instrumentalists and filling up this chancel with this glorious choir. I'm sure there's been a time or two over the past few months when you've wondered whether anything could be worth such a bother. But if the truth that we are each of us loved by God, without qualification, just as we are, as just who we are... if tonight that truth sinks deeper down into just one heart who couldn't quite believe it before, well... is there anything in all the world more worth bothering about than that?