



### **The Celebration and Blessing of a Marriage**

Mary Lou Stewart and Brad Mersereau

*Saturday, September 2, 2023*

Dear Mary Lou and Brad,

We are - all of us - so grateful to be here with you this day. It's your wedding day! We see you. We know and treasure your unique and beautiful story, your history - and your love together. Today we celebrate you.

It's not unusual for me to mention in my sermons the fact that words matter.

Words matter. Wonderfully, the sacred liturgy for your wedding today began with two familiar words - words that we hear so often, we might even take them for granted.

"Dearly beloved"

Brad and Mary Lou - those two words remind and affirm to all of us of how valuable we are to you - that you would want us here - that you would gather us to be present.

A tangible sign that the love of God we see in your vows of marriage today is part of a broader tapestry of love between God and all of his creation.

You know Brad, I have every confidence that were we to give you even a few moments at the piano in the parlor, we would hear the emergence of a beautiful and playful original tune simply entitled, "Dearly Beloved."

Words do matter. Paul's words in the scripture you selected today remind us - without love we have nothing.

I'll say that again. Without love we have nothing.

Turns out Jesus is talking about love today as well, here in his Sermon on the Mount. He's telling his disciples - and you and me - what a truly love focused life looks like.

And he is setting a pretty high bar. The kind of lived love he is articulating is much more than a feeling - it's a discipline - it's an action - it's a decision.

It's a love that involves meekness, and humility, and mercy and justice and peace and righteousness.. A willingness to sacrifice. A commitment toward setting yourself aside for the needs of another person.

In other words, none of the things our culture particularly celebrates or honors.

And all of the things the two of you are committing to each other today

All of these manners of love, Jesus says, are seen by God and are blessed.

Often when I am meeting with a very young couple, about to be married, I will speak to their vows as an experience to be learned - over the upcoming years of their marriage.

Mary Lou and Brad, beautifully you know and understand the implications of the covenant you are forming today with each other.

As I said earlier, we treasure your unique and beautiful story, your history - and your love now together.

You know, this place is pretty important.

And I don't mean this Church, or even this sanctuary. I mean - this place - right here -where I am honored to be standing.

The preacher often stands here, to share the good news of Christ's love and grace with those gathered. The beautiful tradition here, though, is for members of this parish family to come forward for blessings and for celebrations. Birthdays. Graduations. Anniversaries. Significant transitions.

Brad, you often stood here - in the space, and speak to significant events. Never to comment on yourself, but rather to celebrate others - and the covenants they were making and honoring and keeping.

It is most fitting to see you two right here - this day.

Let's remember, though: Christian marriage is never just about two people. It's not even just about the family and loved ones gathered..

As we are reminded, a Christian marriage reflects the union between Christ and his church. A visible reminder of Christ's love for us.

In Jesus' words today from his Sermon on the Mount, he tells his followers the manner by which their choices, their behaviors - their actions will define how the world comes to understand the depth of His love.

We pray this day your marriage will be such an example.

Today, Mary Lou and Brad, in contrast to the spirit of the age, you are stepping up.

You are making a conspicuous profession about the nature and importance of marriage.

You are publicly proclaiming that you're entering not into a contract but a new covenant, a sacred commitment not just to each other but to God.

My goodness, our world today needs to believe in love, as God has made it.

Yes, a love reflecting the very image of God.

God never gives us a vocation without providing the help He knows we'll need to fulfill it. The same shall be true for your marriage. So may you remember this day and always - your help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

In other words, Mary Lou and Brad, you are DEARLY BELOVED.

Amen.

The Reverend C. Phillip Craig, Jr.  
*September 2, 2023*