

Sermon Draft

Text: Revelation 21:1–7

Sermon: “The Perfect Union”

The very first wedding was a match made in heaven. But by the time the wedding reception was done, that marriage was already on the rocks. The very first wedding was between Adam and Eve, our first parents. God gave this woman he had formed from Adam’s rib to the man as his bride. Yet when the cunning serpent threw a wedding reception for Adam and Eve at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that meal ruined everything. It destroyed their marriage. Adam and Eve hid from God, tried to justify themselves, and started accusing and pointing fingers, while not confessing their sins and forgiving. Not only was their perfect marriage on the rocks because of that satanically catered meal of the forbidden fruit. But their lives were too. God had said before, *“In the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”* (Genesis 2:17).

That forbidden fruit divided the perfect couple. Even though Adam and Eve stayed married, their marriage was now full of strife, misunderstandings, selfishness, lack of leading on the man’s part, a desire to dominate on the woman’s part, a loss of love, bitter words, and other great shame and vice.

We see the results of that fallen nature in the offspring of this once perfect union namely, Cain killed his brother Abel. But that's what life is like after that wedding reception at the tree. By this fruit do thee wed the world.

But this was not only a problem that this first married couple alone had. This is also the problem we have. This new nature was passed down through every generation, to every tribe, clan, nation, family, everyone. Including us. That new nature, divorced from God and married to the world, our nature is sinful to the core. The real problem is that by being married to the world and its thoughts, with which the fallen human nature is enthralled, that fallen human nature is wed to the most domineering and abusive spouse there is, the devil himself is the prince of this world and its main agitator. The wedding of man's fallen nature to the world ends in domestic violence to the soul every time. This abusive marriage between the world and the soul brings with it tears, bitter mourning and grief, pain upon pain, and, ultimately, death, both physical and spiritual.

But listen to what Revelation 21 says. For the angel announces hope for all ruined by their nature and abused by the world. The angel announces joy in Jesus.

The angel announces healing for all wounds, and especially the deep wounds of the soul. The angel announces restoration, love, happiness, and, above all, the resurrection from the dead. In short, the angel announces the wedding of Jesus and his Church of all believers.

“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away’” (vs 2–4).

We see this because Jesus dwells with man, and man with God. He dwells with man first by becoming incarnate, by taking on our human flesh which is united to the divine Son of God. As true God and true man, Jesus came to be numbered with sinners, to listen, to love, to rescue, and, yes, to woo. Just as Abraham sent his servant to Laban to find a bride for Isaac, so Jesus also came in search of a bride.

Not for an earthly marriage, but to find his Church. And he found her, called to her from her window where she was shut up in her room of death. And won her heart to be his, simply by his gracious Word and Spirit, and by water and the Word.

Now we see that city, the new Jerusalem, which is God's Holy Church, triumphant in glory, coming dressed as a bride adorned for her husband. It is the perfect description of the spiritual marriage between Jesus and the Church. Like the prophet Hosea, who was commanded to take a prostitute as a wife and to forgive her even when she again went astray, so our Lord took to himself a defiled bride. A sinful bride, with nothing in her that should make him love her. Yet what does Jesus do? As a new Hosea, Jesus showers his bride, the Church, with undeserved love. He wins her heart away by his gentle Word and teaching of forgiveness. Jesus separates his people from their abusive former relationship with the world's ways. Jesus, like the ideal husband, gave everything he is and has for her good when he laid down his life on the cross. If believers depart from his grace, and then come back in shame, guilt, and confession of sins, Jesus speaks love to them and restores them undeservedly to himself by his Word, that they might believe it.

In the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, characters search for the Holy Grail, the cup from which Jesus supposedly drank at the Last Supper. The movie says that any worthy person who drank from that cup would live forever. It's a good movie. But it's not true. Go figure Hollywood made something that isn't quite accurate! It's not drinking from this particular cup that gives eternal life. It's Christ who tells us: ***"It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life without payment."***

The water of life is Holy Baptism. By washing in water with the Word, we have eternal life. God calls us his children. The Holy Spirit is given to us. We are united to Jesus as a member of his Body. And our sins are forgiven. It is not that we don't need faith in Jesus, or that we can persistently live sinfully. As in *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, we do need to be worthy. It's just that this worthiness doesn't come from us. It comes from Jesus. It comes by his death for our sins. It comes by the water of life he gives us to drink. It yes it is by grace through faith and not by works.

The first wedding began as a match made in heaven, but by the time of the wedding reception, their marriage had hit the rocks. It is exactly the opposite for the wedding of Jesus and the Church. The wedding of Jesus to the Church begins on the rocks. No wedding ever seems to be good if it begins with the death of the groom. Yet, because Jesus rises from the dead on Easter Day, there is great joy, and great love for his Church! With new life comes new hope. There is new hope for the marriage of Jesus to his Bride the Church because Jesus is risen. And there is new hope for the Church itself, who lives now by God's grace alone, trusting in Jesus, and separated from its former abusive marriage to the world.

And that feast! That wedding feast of the Lamb and his Church! Such a richer wedding banquet was never seen on earth. This is a feast where Jesus gives his crucified body and his shed blood into the mouths of men, all for the forgiveness of their sins. This is a feast the angels of heaven anticipate in its fullness on the Last Day, a feast in heaven that rejoices in the union of Jesus and his Bride, the Church. For at the Lord's Holy Supper, we get a foretaste of that great wedding feast in heaven. We get to taste on earth this celebration feast of the new bride and groom early.

This is granted for us, mere men & women, God's believers united in the same confession of the faith, simply because Jesus says so. "Take, eat, this is my body. Take, drink, this is my blood." And mere bread and wine become vessels that carry Jesus' true body and blood to our mouths, that we might taste our Savior's love. Jesus comes as the Heavenly Bridegroom for His Bride, the Church.

For this wedding made in heaven, of the Son of God in human flesh to his holy and purified Church, we give thanks, O Lord. Guard and keep us by your Word and Spirit, and by the sacramental foretaste of that feast to come in heaven. *"And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God'"* (vs 2-3).

Amen