

I have something very exciting to tell you. Yesterday afternoon, right here at All Angels, my son Ethan and his fiancé Mackenzie got married. There is a new Mr. & Mrs. Marshall in town! I am thrilled for them and for us. We had an intimate wedding with fifteen people including my mom and aunt and uncle. Being Rector of this church, we had a choice of a wedding of fifteen people or inviting 300. There is no middle ground. A reception for the parish is being planned by the Party Planning Committee so stay tuned. I started smiling yesterday and have not stopped.

Holy Matrimony is a sacrament. That means that it is an outward visible sign of an inward and invisible grace. Weddings happen to be very visible and, I think accordingly, weddings symbolize a deeply inward and spiritual (and largely invisible) grace. This was especially true on Saturday with Ethan and Mackenzie. Their love for each other is invisible and yet everyone around them can feel it. Their love is infectious in a quiet, Episcopal way. This is why I can't stop smiling.

Another reason why I am happy is that one of the features of the liturgy of Holy Matrimony is when the couple says their vows. Like a sacrament – an outward sign of an inward grace – when we hear them say the vows to each other, it reestablishes and reinforces the commitments of those who witness the vows. In other words, hearing their vows reminds us of the vows we have made. Remembering vows strengthens vows. Here is the reminder: we are to love, to honor, to cherish one another, (say it with me) in sickness and in health, for richer for poorer, and forsaking all others as long as we both shall live.

Here is something else incredible about the day, the giving and receiving of rings which are said with these words: with this ring I give you as a symbol (an outward and visible sign) of my vow. With all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you.

The ring that Mackenzie gave Ethan was my dad's (Ethan's grandfather's). In August 1964, my mom gave it to my dad with those same words! Here we are, nearly 60 years later; dad has passed away but his ring is now alive again and acting as a symbol of love and commitment. The wedding ring that Ethan gave Mackenzie is from her mother's side of the family. It too is now alive! Wedding rings are a shining symbol of love and commitment to this broken and confused world. The rings they gave each other are a visible symbol of the vows they made to each other. And, those rings have family history which is now alive again.

Let's take a step back for a moment and reflect.

The present time we are in right now is a result of our history. There is no separating the present moment from our history because we are a composite of it. Think of it this way: right now, you are awake and hearing [reading] this message. You can do so because you ate some food yesterday or today and hopefully had some rest. Your energy to absorb the current moment is a direct result of eating and drinking fluids before this moment. It's not the food that you will eat, or the sleep you will get in the future that fuels you for this moment. It is what you have consumed in your recent past that makes you cognitive of this present moment. Along those same lines, you did not wake up this morning with the ability to read and hear and understand English. Somewhere in your history, you learned English. That makes your history your present right now. That is why it is said our history informs our present.

Performing the wedding of my son was a little like an out of body experience. I have done many weddings, and I am a professional, full-time priest. Yet, it's my son. There is a delicate balance of acting professional, and rote, and embracing the moment of what is happening with Ethan and Mackenzie right in front of my eyes, and with my hands. After receiving Holy Communion – the happy couple wanted the first meal they shared together to be the Eucharist – they knelt in front of the altar. I took off my white stole and wrapped it ceremonially around their hands and said the nuptial blessing. Halfway through the blessing it dawned on me that the words I am saying are the same words that were said at my parent's nuptial blessing. Somehow my knees did not buckle right then (thanks be to God for the indwelling grace power and strength of the Lord!). Yet that blessing was not invented in August of 1964. Or 1764. Or even in the year 0064.

*Pour out the abundance of your blessing upon this man and this woman.
Defend them from every enemy. Lead them into all peace.
Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts,
a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown upon their foreheads.*

The Lord bless, preserve, and keep you; the Lord mercifully with his favor look upon you and fill you with all spiritual benediction and grace; that you may faithfully live together in this life, and in the age to come have life everlasting.

These prayers and blessings are based on ancient Hebrew prayers. Talk about the past being alive in our present! We didn't just invent these; they were given to us and made alive every time we say them and remember them. Alleluia!

Speaking of Hebrew, let's get to the Gospel message (I've explained why I am smiling, now let's hear some more good news). If you have been following along with my messages, you'll know that the Gospels and the New Testament were all written in Greek; so why am I bringing up Hebrew? For me, Hebrew is there just in case Greek gets a little easy. But seriously, to really get the message of Jesus, reading it in the original language is a great way to go. Just know this: behind the Greek is Hebrew and Aramaic words as well as 1st century Jewish practice and mysticism. In other words, Jesus didn't just make up, off the cuff, the stuff that he did and said. It is rooted in history and tradition which is made alive every time we remember it. With that being said, I'd like to introduce you to a Hebrew word which is also a Jewish practice. The word is *kavanah* (caw-Van-awe).

Let me set the stage for *kavanah*.

Today's Gospel lesson happened during the Last Supper. There were a great number of expectations placed on Jesus. Everyone there – including everyone in Jerusalem from the Roman Guard to Pilate to all the pilgrims who had traveled for the Great Passover and to see Jesus – knew something big was in the air. Jesus had just marched into Jerusalem with people throwing their coats and palm branches on the ground and shouting, “Hosanna in the highest!” The Temple was in a fervor at what Jesus had done there. And it all came down to the Passover meal. Judas, and some other disciples, believed Jesus to be the Messiah – the one to be a military and governmental ruler that would kick out the Roman occupying army, to free Palestine and restore it to the Israel they had heard about with King David. Jesus made it clear that time was not now. Instead, he would be handed over, crucified, and killed on the cross. And three (Hebrew calendar) days later, would rise. This was not what Judas had expected. He turned Jesus over to the authorities. In other words, expectations killed Jesus. (Jesus himself knew it was coming and many believe he convinced Judas to do what he did) During the Passover, the Last Supper, Jesus moved his disciples from expectation to *kavanah*.

It takes many words in English to explain what *kavanah* is. Intention. Purpose. Mindfulness. Pausing. Remembrance. Our Eucharistic liturgy uses *kavanah* at various points. When I hold up the Gospel book after the reading there is an intentional, mindful pause that takes place. That is *kavanah*. I practice reading the Gospel before you all get here. When I read it by myself, *kavanah* is not present. But, when we gather, and I read it, *kavanah* is present.

When I take the bread and lift it up, just before it is broken, that is kavanah. It is being mindful – remembering – that Jesus lifted up the bread, said this is his body, and then broke it. Some of you had wine last night; we did at the reception too; but, this wine is different because of kavanah.

Being neighbors with Temple Beth Israel means that from time to time I hear the shofar being played. The shofar is a rams horn that is played like a trumpet without valves. It is a deeply spiritual and important aspect of Jewish liturgy and gathering. The shofar-blower will warm up and practice before it is used. I can tell you from experience that I can hear the difference when it is practiced and when it is used in kavanah with the assembly outside. When the blower is practicing, it sounds nice but not much stirs inside me. However, when the assembly is gathered outside and the blower plays it, all of nature stands still. The birds who sing suddenly stop. I even swear that once, on a windy day, the wind stopped for a few moments while the sound was fresh in our ears. That is kavanah. The intentional blowing of the shofar with the assembly – and all of nature responds to it. It's an outward auditory experience that strengthens our inner spiritual self.

Back to the Last Supper, everyone was gathered around the table with all sorts of expectations. Jesus then introduced kavanah – a mindful pause and intentional remembering that had them all get in touch with their inner, invisible spiritual self and the indwelling Spirit of God.

Kavanah.

Ethan and Mackenzie and I practiced the words of Holy Matrimony leading up to the ceremony. Yet, when we were all assembled, and when they said their vows, there was kavanah. A mindful, intentional, purposeful set-aside time that strengthens and brings joy and peace.

There are a lot of expectations with weddings and marriages. Most of what we do in pre-marital (and marital) counselling is management of expectations. Today's unfulfilled expectations are tomorrow's resentments – according to the tradition of Alcoholics Anonymous. Jesus moved his people, and us today, from expectation to kavanah. Weddings take us to moments of deep kavanah that inform us for our whole lives. And, the spiritual side of holy matrimony takes us from expectations and moves us into kavanah – a mixture of blessing, remembrance, and history that informs our present and future.

In our world today, we have a lot of expectations and fears. There are things that divide our communities and our nation. ... just like in Jesus' day. Our Gospel lesson highlights Jesus in that time of anxiety moving from expectation to the kavanah of love. He commands us to love one another as he has loved, is loving, and will love us. Loving one another is our kavanah. It is setting aside differences and expectations and pausing with one another to be mindful that God loves them as God loves us.

We rejoice today in our kavanah moment. Ethan and Mackenzie are married and our vows to each other have been strengthened. Those vows are until we are parted by death. Jesus reminds us that his love, the love of the Father in Heaven, is not parted by death. It is everlasting and forever. Our command, which is also our kavanah, is to pause in God's love for us and to share God's love with one another as he has (is and will) loved us.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.