

The Marriage of Matt Nelson and Erin McGrath
St. Paul's Church, Healdsburg
The Reverend Sally Hanes Hubbell
April 11, 2015

It's actually a very difficult thing to be married at St. Paul's Church. I know that we are a pretty little church in picturesque Healdsburg, in the heart of wine country and all that, and I know that many people see St. Paul's and think, what a perfect spot for a wedding! But once they talk to us and learn that in order to get married here we require a rather extensive pre-marriage "getting to know you" period that goes beyond simple wedding preparation and the discussion of ceremony logistics, most couples go looking elsewhere.

Not so with Erin and Matt. They first contacted me last fall about getting married here and we made an appointment for them to come up to Healdsburg on a Wednesday at 11 am. I told them that we would be having our weekly Wednesday morning Eucharist and Healing Service at 10 am, and they were welcomed to join us if they would like. They did join us, much to the delight of all of us regulars who were gathered here on that Wednesday morning.

It was a special day because we were dedicating a painting of the Peaceable Kingdom by a beloved and very elderly parishioner named Sarah Barnes. Sarah has some serious health problems and had recently moved some distance away, and so it was a big deal to have her with us. It was a very moving, sweet and intimate service, attended entirely by Church regulars and close friends, with the exception of Matt and Erin, but they nonetheless fit right in. Matt actually hung the picture on the wall.

I instantly liked them both a lot. They came for two or three other Wednesday morning services over the next few months, and their presence among us I can best describe as gracious. They graciously opened themselves up to be more than visitors. On that very first morning they were here, they showed themselves to be team players - which is of course an excellent starting point for marriage.

Although it has been evident to me in my relatively short acquaintance with them, that Erin and Matt are very good and genuine people, I don't think I need to tell you that. You are their closest friends and family, and I imagine you know better than I how special they are. I believe them to be very compatible and loving with one another, and wise in the choice of partner, but you probably know that already as well.

What I see in them that may be unique from my perspective as a parish priest, is a certain generosity of spirit. Not everyone would be willing to come and spend their time, not once, but repeatedly, with a small and rather quirky weekday church gathering. The Episcopal Church requires that all couples wishing to be married meet with a priest for pre-marriage counseling, so coming to see me is not out of the ordinary. But coming to our little church service before their appointment with me, and becoming a part of it as they did, is out of the ordinary. What that says to me is they have a fundamental understanding that getting married is not just about them; it is about letting their lives, and their life together, be a part of a greater whole.

Marriage is about so much more than two people loving each other and wanting to spend their lives together. That's an important part of it, but it isn't, in and of itself, the greatest blessing to be found in marriage. The greatest blessing of marriage comes from two people opening their hearts to one another in a way that opens their hearts more fully to life in general.

You see, the whole point of marriage as we see it in the Christian Church, is that your relationship with each other is now a very intentional reflection of God's love for the whole world. Just as God loves us tenderly and reaches out to share this world of abundance and blessing with us, so must your marriage be a source of reaching out to the world around you in tenderness, love, and the sharing of blessings. Just as God calls the world into communion (union, with and for the world), so your relationship with one another will call others into communion - into the union of friendship, love and shared blessing. Your marriage will be an expression of God's love for the whole world.

Matt and Erin, my prayer is that the bond you have with one another will ground you in what is good and true and worthwhile in this world, and that it will give you confidence and inspiration to *share* what is good, and true and worthwhile with the world around you. My prayer is that your marriage will enrich each of you personally, so that your life together will enrich to all who know you.

That is the call of Christian marriage. It was evident to me that Wednesday morning last fall you heard that call, that you heard God calling to you in and through your relationship with one another, and that's why marrying you here today feels so right. As the team players you are, blessed with generosity of spirit and grounded in your deep and tender love for one another, and blessed with family and friends who share your love, you are off to a very good start.