

**The Celebration and Blessing of Holy Matrimony
Alexandra Claire Marquette and Hunter Scott Whitfield
Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish**

14 April 2018

Welcome to this special day in the lives of Hunter and Alex. This truly is a beautiful occasion. There have been hundreds of decisions that have led to this moment in life. The first and most important decision was whether to say “Yes” or “No” to a proposal for marriage. We are here today because Alex said “yes”, taking a leap of faith very similar to the leap of faith Hunter took in asking. Filled with joy and hoping for a future filled with happiness and prosperity, Alex and Hunter chose each other to become one flesh in the eyes of God and in the eyes of this community. We are here because of that “Will you?” and that “Yes!” After this came a thousand decisions that needed to be made. First, who will do the service? There were so many choices! But I believe they made the right decision! Don’t you think? After this they had to negotiate a guest list. Who to invite and who to leave out? These were important questions. Let me tell you that a few of you almost didn’t make it. Some of you came this close. Then, there were questions about wedding coordinators, invitation cards, wedding dresses, bridesmaids, groomsmen, caterers, rehearsal dinners, photographers, tents, tent floors, music, menus, programs, and the list goes on and on. And all of this in addition to several counseling sessions!

So, it would be very easy to believe that what’s happening here is a well-coordinated, excellently planned human event. But, this is not all that is happening here. The reading from the Gospel of Mark today starts the following way, “Jesus said, ‘From the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.’” The implication of this passage is that marriages were in the mind of God from the beginning of creation. In other words, God chose Alex for Hunter and Hunter for Alex from the beginning of creation. Before they were born and before the first decision was ever made, they were in God’s mind, who already knew they were meant for each other. Marriages are then, not so much a human action, but a divine invitation, a holy vocation, a blessing from above, a gift from our creator God for the happiness and mutual enjoyment of the couple and for the advancement of communities and civilizations. What’s happening here was pre-determined. This is the realization of ancestor’s dreams. This is the unfolding of God’s plan for your lives. From the beginning, the two of you were pre-determined to leave your parents homes to become one flesh.

What this means is that the desire for Marriage has been implanted in our DNA even before we were born. Today, you both leave the nest and join each other for eternity. What this means is that today is your parent’s “Independence Day.” Don’t be surprised if they buy small convertibles or motorcycles tomorrow morning and decide to run away for several years. Don’t let their tears fool you. Those are tears of joy. They are finally getting rid of you! You are now someone else’s

problem. In their hearts they are shouting, "Alleluia, thank you, Jesus! They are finally gone. The day has finally come!"

The reading from Mark continues as Jesus says, "Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate." This is an interesting statement. We may wonder, "Who or what was trying to separate married couples back in the day of Jesus?" The answer will surprise you. Marriage, as an institution, has been threatened by a number of sources from the very beginning of creation. You know these sources in our own culture: Marriage is seen as a transitory institution, we now speak of starter marriages, divorce is common, work now takes more and more of our time, to the point that we have no time for the other, etc. But, we are not hopeless or helpless. We can protect our marriages and make them so strong that no enemy can ever destroy them. After 28 years as a Clinical Social Worker and 13 in ministry, let me tell you what I believe makes marriages successful:

A successful marriage is built on a healthy dependence on God and on each other. Today God makes from two different people one flesh. You will not lose your individual identity, but your individual identity will be perfected by the joint identity you gain today as husband and wife. Since you are now one flesh, your marriage will need what each of you brings into the union in order to survive and to be healthy.

A healthy marriage is one where each member of the couple turns to God and to each other for comfort at times of conflict, sorrow, pain, depression, or crisis. Today, God calls you to be there for each other. To be the place of refuge where the other can come and be who she or he is, without pretense, without masks, and without exterior pressures. You must be a refuge to each other. When the pains of life come your way, look first into the eyes of your beloved and find there a safe place to heal and to recover.

A healthy marriage is one where each member of the couple seeks first to treat the other with love, with compassion, and with grace. In a healthy marriage, it is not so important to exercise dominance over the other, as it is to choose to love the other with humility and openness every day. At home you are to derive power and authority not by subjecting the other to your will, but, rather, by loving the other with absolute devotion. You derive power and authority in the home by choosing to love the other every day. Remember that, even though love begins as an emotion, it soon becomes a choice you make for the other every day. You must choose to love in order to have a healthy marriage.

A healthy marriage is one where each member learns to fight fairly, to treat the other with justice, to be at peace with the other, and to forgive. To choose to love the other is more important than to be right. A healthy marriage uses generous amounts of forgiveness and peace-making. I say to both of you now what I have said to every other couple I have married: Forgiveness is necessary for all marriages to survive and to thrive. You will offend each other. Learn to forgive early on and you will have a marriage that will last forever.

So, today as you engage in this mutual journey, I invite you to depend on each other and on God; to turn to God and to each other for comfort, and “forsaking all others to comfort each other for as long as you live”. I invite you to love each other with compassion and with grace. Choose each other every day. Above all people, choose each other. Above all possessions, choose each other. Above your profession and accomplishments, choose each other. Above your own needs and wants, choose each other. I invite you to be fair with the other and to practice generous forgiveness every day. A couple who doesn't forgive, doesn't truly love.

And lastly, I invite you to take God along for the ride. A life without God becomes self-centered, self-driven and empty. The health of your marriage is too important to leave God out of it.

And, as you look at this wonderful people present here today, remember where you came from. You have deep roots that reach deeper than these beautiful oak trees outside. Use the support of these friends and family to strengthen your marriage. Don't be afraid to use the support of the people present here to make your marriage stronger. Help is always a telephone call away.

May God bless your journey together, and may he give you the peace, joy and happiness that you both deserve. In Jesus name we pray, Amen!