

Holy Matrimony: Brett Thomas Crowley ~ Aubree Angelia Ann Adams
November 30th, 2024

Not many of us get excited about taking tests... especially young lads. Their pulse rates ratchet up for other things but not so much for exams, no matter how proficient one might be in a particular subject matter. When I told Brett that I had some homework for him, there was an audible groan, not fortissimo, mind you, but I sensed that homework wasn't his jam. Even though this was just a phone call I could sense his shoulders drooping, his head incline forward and a momentary pause before soldiering up for whatever I had in mind. Then I gave Brett his assignment. Why this woman? Why Aubree Angelia Ann? Why hitch your pony to her wagon? As soon as Brett heard the question he became the human embodiment of the sun on the Kellogg's Raisin Bran box. He was more excited than he won the mullet contest last week in Abilene. His shoulders squared up, his head lifted and he said: "Oh, I got this."

I ask that question of every couple at whose wedding I officiate (the answer is to be given to me in writing). Sometimes it's the eloquence of a person's answer that impresses. Sometimes it's the raw emotion that leaps off the page. Sometimes it's the depth of knowing the other person, knowing the substance of marriage, knowing how God has blessed them through their chosen mate. Marriage is music but marriage is also roll up your sleeves work. Marriage is God's transcendent design but it is lived in a broken world. Sinners marry sinners and they procreate and bring little sinners into this world. Ultimately, Marriage is and always will be Christ and His bride, the church. Gender means something. Man's creation, male and female, means something. It was not good for the man to be alone. There was no suitable helper found for the man so God caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep. Then God opened up a place in Adam's side and God created the last thing that He made, the sublime Eve. Adam was no longer alone. At last! This is bone of my bones and flesh and my flesh. Adam's exuberance leaps off the page. Eve was built for Adam, and he for her. One flesh; that is poetry. One flesh; that is music; divine music; Gospel music.

Eve was tempted. The sublime Eve was deceived. The enemy wanted to hurt the crown of God's creation. The enemy sowed His pride into the ear of the woman. You will be like God, knowing good from evil. It is a mystery how a perfect woman could be subject to such a foul word, but she reached out her hand and took from the tree that she had been commanded not to eat. Adam, ingloriously passive, observes this calamity and then participates in it. Sin and death burst into the Garden. Pain and death burst into the Garden. Heartache and death enveloped the primordial pair.

What leapt off the page of both Aubree's and Brett's homework was grace. Sadly, grace is often misunderstood in contemporary American Christianity. Believers sometimes think that they cooperate with God to achieve their salvation – God does His bit and we do our bit. Biblical Christianity emphasizes that grace is either 100% or it is not grace. Diluting God's work by holding to the idea that we contribute something to our salvation empties the cross of its power. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one may boast." "When you were dead in trespasses and sin, God made you alive in Christ, it is by grace you have been saved." Grace is the most stunning reality that the church possesses. Christ crucified is grace. Christ's forgiveness being lavished

on the undeserving is grace. That sinners are made holy is grace. That God is genuinely pleased with us in Christ is grace. That heaven is our home is grace. That we have a merciful God is pure grace. That we have a Father who runs to us prodigals with the robe, the ring, the sandals, and the promise of the fattened calf is grace.

When believers know grace it sweetens everything in life. These two beautiful people, this radiant bride and this elated groom, they know grace. It is not an abstract commodity. To them grace is not an elusive and purely theoretical idea but the divine reality that binds them together. They have seen it in each other. They have had their eyes opened to Divine grace by seeing it beautifully embodied in each other. Their relationship is built on the transcendent truth that will never, ever change. That makes them wise. That makes them blessed. That makes them celebratory, rich, and grateful – to God, to each other. That’s what I read in their homework. A Christian who doesn’t know the glory of God’s grace is always having to prove himself, prove herself. Love is diminished in that situation – security and trust and devotion are all diminished when grace is diluted or maligned or casually disregarded.

God made us the way that He did, male and female, for one paramount reason. God instituted marriage in the Garden of Eden for our first parents for one paramount reason. That reason is right in front of us today. “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:25-27). The Lord Christ was made man and came in search of a bride but no holy bone of his bone, no pure flesh of His flesh could be found. We were soiled, profane. Humanity was wretchedly mired in sin. God would not unite Himself to what is profane. Humanity must be cleansed of our filthy rags, our unholy nature. The only agent to clean us is blood, Christ’s blood. So God caused His Son to fall into a deep sleep, the sleep of death on the cross, and God opened a place in Jesus’ side by way of a soldier’s lance. Christ’s bride comes from His side, a tide of blood and water came flowing from Christ’s side in death. Christ’s blood washed us and made us holy so that we might have union with Him. Jesus gladly gave His life on the cross for His bride. He wooed her by dying. He claimed her by dying. Jesus’ perfect love is what transforms poor sinners.

Look at this bride. She is magnificent. Aubree is the embodiment of Christ’s church. In her homework this bride spoke of her groom with words that were laden with grace. She knows that Brett listens to her, supports her, does not judge her. She is stronger in his company. She knows that she is loved, defended, prized. She knows that her suitor would gladly sacrifice himself for her. Christ’s church is holy by virtue of what He has done. His blood, His grace washed us in Holy Baptism and we have been cleansed of every spot, every blemish, every wrinkle. Aubree is an icon of the church; humble, devout, radiant, wholesome, and true. What lies beneath marriage is Christ’s cross and His sacrificial love. What lies beneath love is grace. Love and grace are alive in Brett and Aubree because Christ has claimed them as His own and they know it, they live it, they celebrate it and share it and today they very much embody it.

To be sure, marriage is often roll-up-your-sleeves work. Where there is love and grace that work is productive. You will have no shortage of opportunity to forgive one another. That is sweet work as well. You will commune together. What a blessing. Christ and His bride become one

flesh as the Lord gives us His body to eat and His blood to drink. That grace is brought to your lips and you will commune side by side, as husband and wife. There will be no shortage of restoration as you receive the bounty of Christ's righteousness side by side at His altar. As strong as you are now, you will grow stronger. Love grows. Your awareness of God's grace will grow. A life of richness awaits. At last! Now you will share it all together.