



MARRIAGE ENRICHMENT SUNDAY

Sunday, March 27, 2011

(Be sure to view the great video of the Trinity UCC Married Couples Dance Ministry below.)

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The unit you are viewing, Marriage Enrichment, is a compact unit. This means that it does not have a supporting cultural resource unit and worship unit. Instead, to enliven the imagination of preachers and teachers, we have provided scriptural text(s) that we suggest for this moment on the calendar along with a sermonic outline, suggested links, books, articles, songs, and videos. For additional information, see Marriage Enrichment in the archives of the Lectionary for 2009 and 2010. 2011 is the first year that the African American Lectionary has posted compact units for moments on its liturgical calendar.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment: Marriage Enrichment

Juan and Stacey Floyd-Thomas wrote the following for Marriage Enrichment Day for the 2009 African American Lectionary commentary:

“Black Marriage Day” is a marriage education initiative promoting the benefits of marriage in the black community. According to its founder, Nisa Isola Muhammad, all over the country on the last Sunday in March, African American marriage activists commit to changing the black community by proclaiming that marriage matters to the black community. Through marriage awareness seminars, enrichment activities, and re-commitment ceremonies marriage activists work to reclaim the marriage partnership as part of the legacy and future of black empowerment.¹ This day was born in an effort to mobilize couples to demonstrate their support for marriage. By renewing their marriage vows during a national celebration of marriage, their actions focus attention on the institution of marriage as a key building block of family, community, churches, country, and civilization. But this day is not only to celebrate an institution within the black community but to highlight the benefits of this institution. Research shows that married people live longer, maintain better health, succeed more in careers and income, feel more fulfilled in their lives, report satisfying sexual relations, and have happier, better disciplined, and more successful children. Making a special day to observe the benefits of an institution based on black love has the potential to revitalize the black community that is suffering from poverty, bad health, depression, poor relationships, and much more. For the black church, this day is a sacred day wherein the true benefits of marriage, which seem to be a well-kept secret from the black community, is shared as good news to those who have either invested in or those who desire happy and successful marriages.

With this statement as our backdrop, the following sermonic outline and materials are presented for Marriage Enrichment Sunday 2011.

II. Marriage Enrichment: Sermonic Outline

A. Sermonic Focus Text: Proverbs 18:22 (New Revised Standard Version)

He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord.

B. Possible Titles

- i. Let's Stay Together
- ii. Marriage Is Worth It
- iii. Legalize Your Love

C. Point of Exegetical Inquiry

It is always important to interpret a Scripture in its larger context because it allows us to draw meaning from the text based on its homiletical flow and the development of the book of the Bible being studied. This text falls within the pericope of Proverbs 18:22–19:10 and it addresses the divine and human treatment of those in poverty. In this larger pericope we find our text.

Most Bibles translate the description of what a man finds when he finds a wife as “a good thing.” In light of the context of this pericope, the “good thing” he finds is similar to saying the person obtained something that has great value; this would be particularly important to those who are poor (the original audience for this text). Moreover, because the person gains something valuable, he has a reason to feel happy. In this way, “good thing” connotes the significant worth of marriage and the benefits the people involved receive from it. A person may not have much monetary wealth, nevertheless he or she can still be considered wealthy due to God’s grace and mercy, love, and companionship if he or she is married.²

Let us also remember when discussing this text that women in Solomon’s context had few marital rights. Any sermon provides opportunity for us to advocate for justice in all arenas, including marriage. So, be sure to sermonically promote marriage as an enriching partnership, not as an institution that allows for continued male domination.

III. Introduction

In 2010 The Heritage Foundation—a conservative research and educational institution—released an article that suggests that marriage is one of the greatest weapons today to fight poverty. Marriage is so crucial to the fight against poverty that the foundation ranks it beside graduating from high school and having a job. Marriage is believed to be powerful enough to help reduce the high poverty rate of black, single-parent homes, which are five times more likely to be poor. As the title of the article purports, marriage shows the way out of poverty.³

We know that much more than marriage is needed to pull persons out of poverty. Especially needed in America are the socio-cultural changes that if enacted will help poor people believe that marriage is valuable. In other words, men who can’t obtain jobs are not likely to believe that marriage is valuable. Women who can’t find mates with education and skills and who will co-parent in some fashion are less likely to believe that marriage is a way out of poverty.

That said, few would argue that when certain socio-cultural-economic hurdles are cleared, especially for those who want to parent children, marriage can provide spiritual, economic, and other benefits. Offering marriage as an institution for enrichment of persons (spiritually, emotionally, and economically) is not new advice. Solomon, the wisest man ever according to the Bible, acknowledged the value of marriage thousands of years ago. When trying to give poor people a reason to count their blessings even when they don’t have much money to count, Solomon notes that marriage is one of the most valuable assets a person can possess because it is a gift from God. For Solomon, a good marriage was a clear reason for a person to say “I’m wealthy.” Having a good marriage was and is a legitimate reason to hold your head high. Marriage was and is a good reason for a person to say “I’m favored by God.”

As we continue the struggle to revitalize the black community, all of us—married or single—should pause today to applaud one of the keys to our historic success—strong marriages. We may not have all of the riches that we desire for our community, but if we support marriage, we will have reason to say we’re rich—in love, longevity, and laughter. We will be able to say we’re rich because good marriages provide us with things that money cannot buy. I thank God that my siblings and I have been made rich by and are the products of a 32-year marriage.

IV. Moves/Points

Move/Point One – God desires that marriages occur

- a. The desire for marriage comes from God;
- b. A man expresses his desire for marriage by preparing for it and then searching for the right woman; and
- c. The woman expresses her desire for marriage by being prepared for marriage when the right man proposes marriage.

Move/Point Two – Marriage is a valuable gift

- a. It is a sign of God’s grace and mercy;
- b. It is just as valuable as money; and
- c. It is sufficient reason to be happy.

Move/Point Three – God highly approves of marriage

- a. The high divorce rate suggests our society disproves of marriage;
- b. It is God’s will for people to get married and stay married; and
- c. God celebrates weddings and wedding anniversaries.

V. Celebration

God shows that God highly regards the institution of marriage in that God calls the relationship between God and the people of God a marriage. The Creator showed us the greatest example of someone determined to save their marriage when God sent the most valuable thing God had— God’s self—into the world to tear up the divorce papers filed by Satan. God hanging on the cross was God’s way of saying “I don’t want a divorce” or “Let’s stay together.” Let's, let's stay together. Loving you whether, whether Times are good or bad, happy or sad. Let's, let's stay together. Loving you whether, whether...

VI. Illustration(s)

Love Letters

A few years ago, the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library in Independence, MO made public 1,300 recently discovered letters that the late President wrote to his wife, Bess, over the course of a half-century. Mr. Truman had a lifelong rule of writing to his wife every day they were apart. He followed this rule whenever he was away on official

business or whenever Bess left Washington to visit her beloved Independence. Scholars are examining the letters for any new light they may throw on political and diplomatic history. For our part, we were most impressed by the simple fact that every day he was away, the President of the United States took time out from his dealing with the world's most powerful leaders to sit down and write a letter to his wife.

—Bits & Pieces, October 15, 1992, pp. 15–16

This illustration was taken from Bible.org. Online location: <http://bible.org/illustration/harry-s-truman> accessed 5 January 2011

You may also see the Sermon Illustrations section of the African American Lectionary for additional illustrations.

VII. Sounds, Sights, and Colors in This Passage

Sounds: God's applauding when a man and woman marry; a man rejoicing when he finds his wife; a woman's rejoicing when her husband arrives; a man's footsteps as he searches for his wife; family and friends celebrating with a couple;

Sights: The smiles on the faces of God, the man, and the woman; God giving marriage a thumbs up; and

Colors: The vibrant colors of all the components of a wedding.

VIII. Songs to Accompany This Sermon

A. Well-Known Song(s)

- Let's Stay Together. By Al Green
- You Are My Ministry. By T.D. Jakes

B. Modern Song(s)

- The Christian Love Song. By Phil Nicholas and Brenda Nicholas
- When God Gave Me You. By Bebe & CeCe Winans
- Close to You. By Bebe & CeCe Winans
- The One He Kept for Me. Performed by Maurette Brown-Clark
- Finally. By Darryl Coley
- Forever I Do. Performed by Image

C. Spiritual(s)

- Let Us Break Bread Together

This spiritual could be sung as a duet for male and female voices. It is also suitable as a prayer invitation for couples.

D. Liturgical Dance Music

- Love U with the Rest of My Life. By Fred Hammond

E. Invitational Song(s)

- So Easy to Love You. Performed by Israel Houghton

IX. Videos, Audio, and/or Interactive Media

- “Married Couples Dance (Ministry) in Church.” The Married Couples Dance Ministry of Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago dance to BabyFace’s “Every time I Close My Eyes.” Married couples minister in dance: Giving thanks and honor to God for the blessing of marriage. Choreography by Glowing Spirit assisted by Elgin Smith. Online location:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hph6DMnymRQ&feature=related>
- Clips of marriage reconciliations efforts in Tyler Perry’s Why Did I Get Married and/or Why Did I Get Married Too. Online location:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNags8pveck> and
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8HSrehiwoc> accessed 5 January 2011
- 50th wedding anniversary of Russell and Anna on The Cosby Show. Online location:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YkpBNigQHfg&feature=fvw> accessed 5 January 2011
- Wedding Song. By John P. Kee & New life Community Choir. “ASG featuring ladies (John P. Kee - The Wedding Song).wmv.” Online location:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FnWZJBclw5o> accessed 5 January 2011
- Muhammad, Nisa and Rozario Slack. “Basic Training for Couples Curriculum.” Black in America 2. CNN. 20 July 2009. Online location:
<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/LIVING/07/20/bia.black.marriage.guide/index.html> accessed 5 January 2011
- Happily Ever After: A Positive Image of Black Marriage. Dir. Lamar Tyler. Tyler New Media, Inc. 2009. Trailer online location:
<http://www.happilyeverafterthemovie.com/> accessed 5 January 2011
- You Saved Me: Our Marriage Saved My Life. Dir. Lamar Tyler. Tyler New Media, Inc. 2010. Trailer online location: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzkmGkgZEg4> accessed 5 January 2011

X. Books to Assist in Preparing Sermons or Bible Studies Related to Marriage Enrichment

- Arnold, Harold L. Marriage Rocks for Christian Couples. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2009; Arnold, Harold L. Marriage ROCKS for Christian Couples—Leader’s Guide. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2010.
- Butler, Lee H. A Loving Loving Home: Caring for African American Marriages and Families. Berea, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2000.
- Chapman, Gary. The Five Love Languages: How to Express Heartfelt Commitment to Your Mate. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1995.
- Warren, Neil. Finding the Love of Your Life: Ten Principles for Choosing the Right Marriage Partner. New York, NY: Pocket Books, 1992.
- Wimberly, Edward P. Counseling African American Marriages and Families (CPT) (Counseling and Pastoral Theology). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997.

XI. Links to Helpful Websites for Marriage Enrichment and Ideas

- Printable brochure: “What Is a Healthy Marriage: If You Can Conceive It You Can Achieve It.” National Center on African American Marriages and Parenting. Online location: <http://www.hamptonu.edu/ncaamp/resources/> or http://www.hamptonu.edu/ncaamp/docs/HU_NCAMMP_Healthy_Marriage.pdf accessed 5 January 2010
- African American Wedding Traditions. Online location: <http://www.worldlyweddings.com/african-traditions-a/121.htm> accessed 5 January 2011
- African Wedding Traditions & Culture. Wedding Details.com Online location: <http://www.weddingdetails.com/lore/african.cfm#zambian> accessed 5 January 2011
- LGBT: “A Gospel of Inclusion.” The Reverend Dennis W. Wiley, Ph.D., and The Reverend Christine Y. Wiley, D. Min. Pastors, Covenant Baptist Church, Washington, DC. Online location: <http://www.thedefendersonline.com/2008/12/15/a-gospel-of-inclusion/> accessed 5 January 2011

Ideas and Resources for Celebrating Marriage Enrichment

- Launch a Marriage Hall of Fame for those married for 30 years or more who are in your church or community;

- Create a “Ten Most Affordable Marriage Dates” (or best, or most romantic, or most creative) list/contest for your community;
- Honor members of your extended family or community whose marriages have had an impact on your life;
- Organize a “Marriage of the Year” essay contest; and/or
- Use quotes about the marriage of President Barack Obama and Mrs. Obama in church materials on this day. Stritof, Sheri, and Bob Stritof. About.com. Online location: <http://marriage.about.com/od/entertainment1/a/obamaquotes.htm> accessed 10 January 2011

For “More Things to Do: Ideas and Suggestions.” Wedded Bliss Foundation. Online location: http://www.blackmarriageday.com/Black_Marriage_Day/BMD_2011_Resources.html and http://www.blackmarriageday.com/Black_Marriage_Day/Welcome.html accessed 5 January 2011

XII. Notes for Select Songs

A. Well-Known Song(s)

- Let’s Stay Together. By Al Green. Al Green. Let’s Stay Together. Woodland Hills, CA: The Right Stuff Records, 1972 (CD, 2003).
- You Are My Ministry. By T.D. Jakes. Sacred Love Songs. Universal City, CA: Fontana Island Records/UMG, 1999.

B. Modern Song(s)

- The Christian Love Song. By Phil Nicholas and Brenda Nicholas. Our Love (Marriage Enrichment). Los Angeles, CA: Command Records. Online location: <http://www.nicholasministries.com/Phil+and+Brenda+Nicholas+Music.htm> accessed 5 January 2011
- When God Gave Me You. T.D. Jakes. Sacred Love Songs. Universal City, CA: Fontana Island Records/UMG, 1999.
- Close to You. Bebe & CeCe Winans. Still. Jackson, MS: B&C Records/Malaco, 2009.
- The One He Kept for Me. Performed by Maurette Brown-Clark. With This Ring. Various Artists. New York, NY: Haborwood/Verity, 2002.
- Finally. By Darryl Coley. With This Ring. Various Artists. New York, NY: Haborwood/Verity, 2002.
- Forever I Do. Performed by Image. With This Ring. Various Artists. New York, NY: Haborwood/Verity, 2002.

D. Liturgical Dance Music

- Love U with the Rest of My Life. By Fred Hammond. Fred Hammond Presents: In Case You Missed It...And Then Some. New York, NY: Verity/Zomba, 2001.

E. Invitational Song(s)

- So Easy to Love You. By Donald Clay and Michael Grungor. Israel Houghton: Live From Another Level. Mobile, AL: Integrity Label, 2004.

Notes

1. “Black Marriage Day.” Wedded Bliss Foundation. Online location: <http://www.blackmarriageday.com/> accessed 5 January 2011

2. Carson, D. A. New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition. 4th ed. Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994, S. Pr 18:22.

3. Marshall, Jennifer. “Marriage Shows the Way Out of Poverty.” The Heritage Foundation 12 Nov 2010. Online location: <http://www.heritage.org/research/commentary/2010/11/marriage-shows-the-way-out-of-poverty> accessed 5 January 2011