

As some of you know, I had very big plans for this weekend. October 23<sup>rd</sup>, yesterday, was the date Ben and I chose for our wedding, almost a year ago now. Finding a wedding date when you live in two different states, answer to two different bishops, and live according to the calendars of the church and the school year was no easy feat. After months of coordinating schedules, we chose October 23<sup>rd</sup> 2020 as our wedding date. We had a grand vision for a big wedding in Sewanee Tennessee; the height of Anglican liturgy, a huge chapel filled to the brim with singing and incense, the rich tones of the organ spilling out into the night on the campus of the University of the South where we met. I bought a dress. We chose a preacher. We met with the chapel wedding coordinator. I drove down to Nashville every Monday for eight weeks to meet Ben for premarital counseling, fulfilling our obligations to our bishops and to our future together. Our guest list climbed past 200, and our moms called every other day with ideas and questions and excitement. We were well on our way to planning the kind of wedding we hoped would embody the hospitality and abundance we see as a central virtue of our life in Christ.

And then, the news got ugly. Our brothers and sisters around the world and across the country were getting sicker, and rumbles began about limiting travel and closing schools. On March 11<sup>th</sup>, Governor Beshear called for church leaders to

cancel worship and to suspend operations. Father Michael and I spent a very long day consulting with colleagues before the decision was made to cancel worship and all activities through the weekend. At that time, we thought the suspensions of our beloved Fish Fries, Bible Study and our Lenten Stations of the Cross were all temporary, a precaution. When, a week later, Ben drove up here with a milk crate of books and little hope of returning to his seminary campus, reality began to sink in. Ben suggested it might be worthwhile to discuss moving the date of our wedding and I dismissed him out of hand, claiming it was much too soon. Like so many with major life events coming up, I prayed he was overreacting. Soon we learned that he wasn't.

After weeks of discussions, tears, prayers, and phone calls with loved ones, we made the heartbreaking decision to let go of our big October wedding. We had no idea when it would be safe again to ask over 250 of our dear ones to travel to see us, and an indefinite postponement was inconceivable. For us, entering into marriage was not another party to reschedule. As soon as it became possible under our Diocesan and state guidelines, we traded in the big black tie wedding for a small, immediate family only liturgy in a cathedral that had been emptied of its pews. Our parents and siblings sat on folding chairs, six feet apart, in the custom masks I commissioned for the occasion. The closest women in my life styled my

hair and applied my make-up in their living rooms. When I walked down the aisle, my face was covered not by a veil, but by a lace-trimmed mask. Our rings were not blessed on the altar, but rather in our own outstretched hands, from a distance. We received communion in one kind, breaking a fast that had been kept for almost four months.

There was no singing at our wedding, nor was there incense. We did not have a crucifer, or torchbearers, or bridesmaids or groomsmen. No bells tolled. Our hospitality was not embodied by open invitations or a crowded reception hall. Ben and I stood before the altar and wept our way through our vows, and Bishop Terry pronounced our blessing from six feet away. Our first meal as husband and wife was the Eucharistic feast, which we shared with the people who raised us in the faith that led us to one another. Despite every strange pandemic reality, the Church witnessed the beginning of our marriage. Despite isolation, separation, loss, and fear, we stepped into our future, trusting in God's faithfulness. In a season of senseless death and overwhelming anxiety, making our vows before God became our small act of defiance.

In our little pandemic wedding, I saw a God who delights in the joys of his children. I saw the Church at her best, a small glimpse of the abundant table set for

us and the radical reunion we crave. I saw a stubborn hope in the promise of tomorrow. In the postponements and the disappointments and the difficult disinventions that have consumed so much of our common life over over the past 7 months, I see the summary of the law as Jesus preaches it “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” In the video calls, car parades, window visits, and the infinite other creative ways families and friends continue to celebrate safely, I see what Paul so lovingly reminds the Christians in Thessalonica- “So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us.” This is how we fulfill the great commandment. We share not just one sliver of our life with God but our entire self, all our heart, all our soul, all our mind, even when it feels as if tomorrow will never come. We hold nothing back, and we trust that the God who made the heavens and the earth will accept our humble offerings.

I did not get married this weekend. That day has come and gone. In a year that has pierced the hearts of so many, in a season that has stolen so much, Ben and I chose to make promises about a future we can hardly imagine. I am struck by how utterly Christian that is. Jesus told his disciples that they would suffer for his sake, and

they walked with him anyway. The women knew the tomb was sealed with a great stone, and they went there anyway. Paul spent his ministry comforting persecuted converts, and they practiced their faith anyway. The world keeps trying to end, and folks get married anyway. The Christian life is always a little bit like planning a wedding at the end of the world. Tomorrow will remain unknown, and we make plans anyway. The human heart will falter, and we make promises anyway. Death and loss and grief happen, and we sing anyway. Loving God and neighbor with everything we have and with everything we are in a world divided by sin and greed and pride is an act of stubborn faithfulness, an embodiment of foolish grace. But we are Christians, and we love anyway.