

## St Valentines Day

14 2 10

God of wonder and of joy:  
grace comes from you  
and you alone are the source of life and love.  
Without you we cannot please you;  
without your love we are nothing worth.  
Send your Holy Spirit  
and pour into our hearts  
that most excellent gift of love  
that we may worship you now with thankful hearts  
and serve you with willing minds

My text is taken from the end of last week's reading from Genesis 2: 'Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh.' (v24)

This year, St Valentine's Day falls on a Sunday so if there were no cards in the post yesterday, I guess there is still the slim hope they might arrive tomorrow. With today coinciding with the 'lovely' St Valentine's Day, the Anglican Church has suggested the theme of our Sunday worship should focus on marriage. Since I'm not married myself, you are entitled to be even more sceptical than usual about what I say. Is it not reasonable to expect experts on marriage to be married themselves so what can a bachelor priest know about marriage that is worth

hearing? Good point; but on that basis, midwives need to have babies before they can deliver one which might in itself pose a problem if your midwife happens to be a man!

And what it is to be a Man is the focus of my sermon. Man, human beings, men and women alike, we are all individuals created in the image of God. Each one of us has an individual identity in the sight of God and we are people in our own right. That said, we do need other people too: that much quoted phrase from one of John Donne's sermons – 'No man is an island' – sums up the fact that we need other people and we need to live in society and though we do need to be alone, we are not meant to be on our own all the time. What we all need, as individuals, are significant others: people who care for us and for whom we care. That is the main point of the second creation story which we heard read last week from Genesis 2. Adam needed a suitable companion and Eve, a person like him but different physically from him, was the ideal mate. Hence we have the creation ordinance that is my text this morning: 'Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife and they become one flesh.'

Marriage is the union of two people. It is the legal context in which two people share their lives together and through their sexual relationship, children are born. It is the model for a stable society in which people entrust themselves wholly to another person, confident in the knowledge that they will be cherished, confident in the stability that a loving relationship brings to two people is the best context in which to conceive and to bring up children. That said, we know that marriages can go horribly wrong, that divorce may be the only option to resolve

irreconcilable differences. We know that more and more people are living together without getting married and we know that people of the same sex can care for each other with a real, self-giving love. That said, I want to affirm that even if some folk practise a different model for their relationship well or that some practice marriage badly, it does not devalue from the fact that marriage is a biblical, God-given example of a good way to live our lives: to love God by loving another person even as we love ourselves.

As a priest I have officiated at many weddings and the wonderful thing is to be present when two people are so much in love that they want publically to bring what is most precious to themselves to a church in order to sanctify their relationship in the presence of their families, their friends and their God. The blessings in a wedding service are many but they are all designed to cement that relationship. That spiritual glue may or may not work and each one of us has a choice and some of us will not be faithful to our vows.

But allow me to affirm on St Valentine's Day the virtue of love and of being in love. And if you have been fortunate to have found the person to love, who loves you and whose love you are able to return, then marriage is the ideal way to express your feelings in a legal and spiritual bond which helps maintain the bonds that join us all together in society as the family of God on earth.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's Dinard*

*14<sup>th</sup> February, 2010*

H: Sermon 21: Valentine

