



*1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. 2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. 3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure. (1 John 3:1-3)*

I consider the word, BELOVED, to be the most beautiful in the entire Bible. In its use in 1 John 3, it is the Greek word, *ἀγαπάω*, meaning ‘inordinate’ love which supersedes brotherly love. BELOVED appears in the King James Bible 113 times.

Last week I conducted a wedding ceremony for two people who are dear to my heart, and I did so before a congregation who, likewise, are dear to my heart. In the traditional Church of England Book of Common Prayer, *The Form of Solemnization of Matrimony*, opens with these lines:

DEARLY beloved, we are gathered together here in the sight of God, and in the face of this company, to join together this Man and this Woman in holy Matrimony; which is an honourable estate, instituted of God, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and his Church: which holy estate Christ adorned and beautified with his presence and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is commended of Saint Paul to be honourable among all men . . . .

In this context, the term BELOVED is a rare singular/plural in the English language. It most often is a plural form referring to many people in the New Testament. I mention this in connection with the Wedding Service to illustrate a great truth and principle of biblical faith. The Beloved Bride of Christ is comprised of thousands and millions of saints both in the Church Militant and the Church Triumphant. But all combine to form One Entity – the Bride of Christ! Each member of Christ’s Church is Beloved, and all in total are Beloved.

Our leading text from 1 John 3 was written by none other than the beloved Apostle John. “*Now there was leaning on Jesus’ bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved.* (John 13:23) Quite naturally, the Apostle who mentions love more than any other is John. He was the Apostle of tender years whose heart was not exposed as often to the immorality and wickedness of the world as was others. Love begets love as surely as rain begets plant life. It is the mark that distinguishes the people of God from all other faiths: *7 Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. 8 He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. 9 In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live*

*through him. 10 Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. (1 John 4:7-11)*

Let us get back to the words of the Wedding Ceremony: DEARLY BELOVED. This opening term applies to all who are gathered together in the Name of God to witness a Holy Event – the Wedding of a Man and a Woman who have agreed to the Wedding under the terms of a Holy Oath and Pledge. In the Church Service the two parties agree to receive each other in the bond of love “*till death us do part.*” The man repeats this vow and pledge: “I, John Doe, take thee, Jane Doe, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part, according to God’s Holy ordinance; and thereto I plight thee my troth. (I pledge my faithful oath)” The woman repeats the same pledge. This is no ordinary oath or vow. It is a Holy Vow made publicly in the presence of Godly witnesses – not to be revoked for it is self-perpetuating in its tenure forever.

To be beloved by our spouse in marriage is a satisfaction of ultimate proportion. It gives comfort and trust to each party that there is none other under the heavens that can take their place. The institution of Marriage was the first that God instituted in old Eden. It was not an experiment, or a sojourn in a different order of life, but for as long as life continues. Why did God institute marriage to be between a man and a woman? Because it satisfied his Holy purpose in propagating the human race throughout the far reaches of the world. Such a purpose was expressed in God’s first commandment to mankind:

*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; MALE and FEMALE created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. (Gen 1:27-28)* This reveals the grievous sin of homosexual marriage and abortion – both are Satan’s weapons to stop the Creation Model of God and reduce mankind to absolute zero.

There is another related purpose of God in Marriage as a Model for the Kingdom of Heaven. It represents that same relationship between Christ and His Bride (the Church) as between a committed man and woman in marriage.

It may seem a bit strange Paul, in Ephesians, does not mention a woman should love her husband but rather the husband should love the wife. *21 Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God. 22 Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. 24 Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. 25 Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; 26 That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, 27 That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. 28 So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29 For no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church: 30 For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones. 31 For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. 32 This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (Eph 5:21-32)* Why is this the case?

I believe it follows in the direct line of how the Model of Marriage typifies the relationship between Christ and His Church. If the husband dearly loves, appreciates, and respects his wife, the woman, being of a more tender disposition, cannot help but return that love – just as the Church echoes the love of Christ. Did the Church randomly fall in love with Christ? No, the Church was loved by Christ first, who gave His life in its

purchase; otherwise, we could not have loved the King of Love. I bring the words to the bar of the Apostle of Love, John: *We love him, because he first loved us.* (1 John 4:19) The love of God for each of His children, and we are all children in His eyes, exceeds anything our imaginations can conjure up. The Church has fallen down in keeping her vows to Christ. Remember the first oath in Holy Matrimony to which both parties respond, "I will?" Read the words of that pledge: "Wilt thou, John, have this Woman, Jane, to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the Holy estate of Matrimony? Wilt thou love her, comfort her, honour, and keep her in sickness, and in health; FORSAKING ALL OTHERS, KEEP THEE ONLY UNTO HER, SO LONG AS YOU BOTH SHALL LIVE?" Has the modern church done this? How about some American Episcopal Churches that have included prayers to Allah in their services, or entertain the prayers of witches and witch doctors? How about those churches that have given respectability to the dirge of homosexual marriage? Have we forsaken all others but Christ when we commit such abominable sins? The marriage of the Church to Christ is a special union. We were chosen by Christ, but our wedding was also an arranged one by the Father.

*4 According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: 5 Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, (Eph 1:4-5)*

Is it not a blessing of untold beauty to be chosen and adopted as the Bride of Christ? Even in our waning moments of this life, He loves us and holds us tightly to His loving breast. As the shadows lengthen and the candle dims, we know He is at bedside holding our hand – not to bury a dead body, but to bear a living soul to Paradise and His home beyond the clouds. Will He not speak words of comfort and joy as we arise from the couch of our earthly expiration? *10 My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. 11 For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; 12 The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land; 13 The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away. (Song 2:10-13)*