

August 21, 2014

John 15:9-17

The Wedding of Christopher Richard and Roger Bingaman

Irving Park Lutheran Church

Pastor Erin Bouman

A Unique and Beautiful Thing

One Monday morning, back near the beginning of July, Bing came in to work in a state. It was hot, I bet traffic was bad, I'm sure he had a busy weekend. (Does he have weekends that are not?) He said to me, with an air of exasperation, "Why Chris and I decided to get the downstairs bathroom redone, while doing two shows, and a full slew of summer music camps, and get married, all in the same summer I do not know!" I had the distinct impression that in terms of the magnitude of attention and attendant stress, at that point, it was the bathroom that had a slight edge on everything else—including their wedding.

I think it was around then that the toilet was temporarily relocated to the living room. Bing told me he gave a warning to the household, that while the toilet was in the living room, you **SHOULD NOT** use it. I think that's an especially good example of his fine sense of humor. Still, even if it wasn't functional, I think it must not have been pleasant having that private appliance in that public space.

Then there was the sink. This is how excited Bing was about this sink: I'm coming in to his office one day to use the copy machine and he tells me, "Wait, you've got to see this thing we ordered. Here, look at this picture online. It looks like an elegant bowl, but it's a sink. Isn't it fan-TAS tic?"

But then the sink arrived, and you realized it lacked a pedestal, and a countertop—and so then those had to be added on to an already stretched-out project. It made for another delay, and required some creativity, but in the end, the result was beautiful. John Johnson, friend and master carpenter who worked on the project, custom built this amazing curved wooden cabinet stand for the bowl. And for countertops? They had marble installed. Marble countertops in a downstairs half-bath—who does that? That is one lovingly-detailed, uniquely beautiful, bathroom. No one else could have come up with it, and it took some time to get there, but there it is.

Why am I talking so much about your new bathroom?

Those fantastic pieces, coming together creatively, uniquely, beautifully, despite delays and challenges...

Why did you decide to do all this this summer?

Anyone who knows you both, knows who you are, and how you are together, knows the answer. Why? Because you are Bing, and you are Chris, and this is the sort of busy, beautiful thing you do. It's what you are together. It's what you make together. No one else could come up with and combine the particular components that make your relationship what it is: the way you wooed one another; the way you work together; the way you have built a family together—Jess and Gus and Mary and Sarah; the way your extended family is part of this: Lois, and Norm and Isabel; the way this church is part of this; the way the many people here are a part of this, all of whom all have their unique connections to you each of you and both of you.

It took some time to get here. I bet traffic was awful.

It took some time to get here. It took laws to be changed. Let's hear it for the legislature of Illinois, and other states as well, more and more of them; for lawyers, and activists, and court cases, and trail-blazing couples!

It took some time to get here. It took discussions to be had, among family members and friends, and here at your church. It took decisions to be made. This is a big thing. The IPLC Women's Book Club even moved their monthly meeting for this!

We laugh, but we know this is big. And not all easy. Chris, and Bing, especially for you, there were times when it must have felt like a public appraisal of what one does in private.

Yet there is something public about this. Being here says something publically. Between the two of you, you have been married for years. It hasn't been a secret, but still, today there's another element to what you are to one another, another expression, another dimension. There's something unique and beautiful to what you say to one another today, because you are saying it here, in front of all of us. You will say these things, and people will be crying, eyes will be shining. It's another facet to your relationship, like the facets on the diamonds, those additional diamonds on your shining, glittering rings. (If they haven't yet told you about these rings, be sure to ask. They told me, "As part of this, we're definitely getting more bling." The bling will be delivered in just a few minutes by Jess and Gus. It was important to you that they have a part in this, it is a joy to you that they are here.

It was important to have us here. There are many besides us, who wanted to be here, many whom you wanted to be here, but couldn't. We can think of many who are not here, whom we wish were here. We are here for them. And we are here for you. It's important that we have a part in this, even though we come with challenges: all the busy-ness of invitations, and travelers, in town and out of town, and people wanting to be "helpful." I know there are times it must have made you want to pull your hair out. Well, maybe not Chris. He doesn't pull out his hair.

In this busy-ness, we have probably been annoying, or frustrating, or even hurtful—I include myself there, though you have graciously not said so. It is an honor to be preaching this sermon. It is an honor to be performing your wedding, the first wedding I've performed here at this church, a first wedding of its kind for this church.

So here we are, for the marriage of Roger Bingaman and Christopher Richard, a marriage blessed by God, recognized by the state of Illinois, witnessed by this gathering of people, performed in the sanctuary of Irving Park Lutheran, the church where your voice, and your organ and piano playing, and your directing, and your liturgical design, and your families, and just who both of you are, invite and express and mediate worship and love of God—the God who created you, just how you are, the God whose love is reflected in your love for each other.

"Why are you doing this this summer?" I asked. Bing said, "Well, this may not sound very romantic, but if anything should happen to me, I want Chris to have a legal right to things." Maybe it was because Bing started to cry when he said that, but it sounded more than romantic, it sounded profoundly loving. It sounded like the love Jesus talks about in the gospel reading we just heard, where Jesus talks about that greater love, that greater love that continues, even beyond laying down ones' life."

What is happening here is holy. It took some time to get here, and not all are here. People of God are always a work in progress. Even as your relationship, with all the years behind it, with all the years ahead of it, is a work in progress. All loving relationships are. The bathroom may be done, but our renovations continue. We are always being redone. We are always working to better know and express that greater love, that unique and beautiful love of God for us.