

SERMON AT THE WEDDING OF MATT WARNE AND AMELIA ROBINSON | 31.12.22

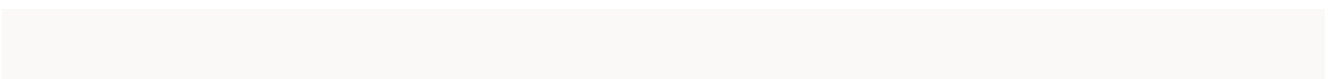
If my notes are right it was in February that Matt and Amelia dropped into St James' and raised the idea of getting married here. On first sight I wasn't sure: a driven traditionalist financial adviser wanting to marry a slightly introverted accountant who admits to being randomly reckless... !

But then we had opportunities to meet them on a fairly regular basis and of course we warmed to them hugely and we are simply delighted to host their very special day with friends and family – including Matt's sister who has flown half way around the world to get here.

And because they are intelligent and good company, I have really enjoyed the preparation sessions with them, not least because they have made me think again about what we are doing today. Because there is no doubt that marriage services have radically changed over the last few years. As an article on weddings said recently: *Brides are no longer female beings who, having laced themselves into expensive wedding gowns, are willing to sit out the whole ceremony silent and motionless! A wedding has long since become a statement. When two people from Generation Y get married, they remain true to their belief in self-love and their compulsion to be seen as unique individuals. Couples today want a wedding ceremony that sees them as special, an occasion that corresponds to their desire for self expression and freedom all wrapped up in a bit of magic...*

And I hope that fusion of new and old is what Matt and Amelia have achieved today. Some of the marriage service is very old indeed: the wedding preface for example is not so very far away from the declaration that was spoken over couples about the time of Magna Carta in 1215! The way Matt and Amelia place the rings on each other's fingers is even older and comes from the Orthodox East. The familiar words, *for better for worse, for richer, for poorer* have been used by literally millions of couples, in every language and culture since medieval times. Even the more modern words like *With my body I honour you, all that I have I give to you...* are distillations of older material and are some of the best words the Church has ever devised.

And then we get their choice of poem, the simply brilliant *Everything I know about love* by Dolly Alderton. You will hear it in full later on but in its choice of images it wonderfully picks out the amazing diversity of life when two people are in love – the loud and the jubilant and the bits which are quiet but equally important. I'm afraid I can't resist a couple of quotes:



I know that love can be loud and jubilant...It can be dancing in the swampy mud and the pouring rain at a festival and shouting "YOU ARE AMAZING" over the band. It's introducing them to your colleagues at a work event and basking in pride as they make people laugh and make you look lovable just by dint of being loved by them. It's laughing until you wheeze. It's waking up in a country neither of you have been in before. It's skinny-dipping at dawn. It's walking along the street together on a Saturday night and feeling an entire city is yours.

And again:

It's lying on the sofa together drinking coffee, talking about where you're going to go that morning to drink more coffee. It's folding down pages of books you think they'd find interesting. It's hanging up their laundry when they leave the house having moronically forgotten to take it out of the washing machine. It's saying 'You're safer here than in a car' as they hyperventilate on an EasyJet flight to Dublin...

What we are lucky enough to be witnessing today is the way in which two people overcome their different personalities and experiences and are ready to work at bringing those two tendrils into one root, into one family.

And what they are discovering is that freedom – the thing we all want – is actually best found when we are willing to see it flourish in a close relationship.

But sharing is never easy and requires loads of forgiving and loads of 'well, never mind' moments. Which is why those traditional vows remain important. When the going gets a bit rough and we wonder whether staying with someone is still possible, those vows remind us that we promised to love one another *till death us do part, for better for worse, for richer, for poorer. As the poem says, Love is a quiet, reassuring, relaxing, pottering, pedantic, harmonious hum of a thing; something you can easily forget is there, even though its palms are outstretched beneath you in case you fall.*

And one final thing: I still remember the three words said to Maria and I in 1981 by the bishop at our wedding: *New every morning.*

Whatever happened yesterday is over and gone. Today is a new opportunity to discover the wonderful things that our partners have to share with us. With God as our guide and with our vows to keep us on track: marriage gives us a freedom to relax, knowing that all our individual strengths and weaknesses are truly cherished by someone else – whatever happens. *Arise my love, my beautiful one, and come away...*