

“The Covenant of Marriage”

Rev. Amanda Hendler-Voss

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Friends, we come today to witness and celebrate, but also to bless and pledge our support in the sacred covenant this couple is making to one another. Though we are small in number today, this vibrant group is gathered because we love and care for you, and your presence in our lives has offered blessing. Those of us gathered here believe that in your union a new day will dawn for the healing power of love, mercy, and peace in our world.

Celeste and Delores, in one of my first meetings with the two of you, I asked you to tell the story of how you met and fell in love. And quite a story it was—one of heartache and healing, one of friendship and attraction, one of sharing a strong faith that forms the basis for your relationship with one another. You spoke of the significance of that token of affection that Celeste gave to Delores the first time you met—a cross that Delores admired, and so Celeste immediately took it off and gave it freely. Your story is also one of addiction and recovery, of continuing to love each other through the hopeless, painful times and also in times of healing and growth. Because you have weathered difficult seasons and lived on life’s margins yourselves, you know the incredible mercy, beauty, and grace of God’s love. I pray that that divine love will be the guiding force in your marriage. There’s no doubt that others will doubt your covenant—you are women who love women, and so just by honoring the love that God has given you for one another, you will face criticism, both within your circle of family and friends and outside of it. And that’s why I’m so thankful that God has given you incredible clarity about what you each love in the other. I’m so grateful that you see each other with God’s eyes of love.

When I asked you what you love about each other, Delores was quick to speak of Celeste’s beauty, both inside and out. She said that you have a way with her, Celeste, that you taught her what it means to receive unconditional love, the kind of love that comes from God. “I love the way she loves me,” Delores said, “we live in harmony.” For those of us who know Celeste, we know that she speaks her truth with honesty everywhere she goes. She is authentic, a creative artist, and also someone who, to quote the psalmist, “inquires at the temple.” Her love and commitment to God are evident in her faith and in her life, and she is constantly seeking to know God and Christ more fully. She is someone who speaks kindly to those living on life’s margins, someone who is always willing to chip in and help out. Celeste brings to this marriage the gift of loving others well—with a genuineness that is rare in this world.

And when I asked Celeste what she loves about Delores, she simply said “I love her for who she is—her mind, her child-like ways, her kind heart, her loyalty. She makes me want to be a better person.” For those of us who know Delores well, we know that she brings to this marriage a wonderful sense of humor, a quick smile, a fun-loving spirit. She is thoughtful, with a firm commitment to her Christian faith and a persistent hunger to learn, research, and write. Celeste said that Delores taught her how to love unconditionally, and that is the kind of love that comes from God. There is no doubt that the world is a better place today because Celeste and Delores have decided to walk life’s journey together in marriage. I hope that you both know that this small group gathered here will be the eyes of Christ for you as you move into your new life together. We will remind you that the love you share is from God, that God blesses your union, that you have gifts to bring to the world that are more inspired because you walk this path together.

In Toni Morrison’s book *Beloved*, one character speaks about his love for his wife by saying, “She is a friend of mine. She gathers me. The pieces that I am, she gathers them and gives them back to me in all the right order. It’s good, you know, when you got a woman who is a friend of your mind.”

The covenant of marriage is the communion of two people before God in body and soul, in mind and heart. It requires that we be caretakers for one another. We do this in the springtime and in the dead of winter, in seasons of extravagant abundance and in times parched by drought, in the mediocrity of the mundane and along the breathtaking brink of the beautiful. How we do it, what happens when two beings become one flesh, remains a sacred mystery that we acknowledge and celebrate, but never fully comprehend.

I pray, Celeste and Delores, that you will live in the heart of this mystery, honoring those places in the landscape of the other’s soul that are knowable only to God. I pray that as the seasons pass you will recall the urgency with which you sought the one whom your soul loves, the one in whom your heart delights. I pray that you will seek God, the Creator of all that lives and breathes, the source of all that is good. I pray that you will seek the face of Christ, the one who gathers us, saints and sinners, at the table of grace. I pray that you will seek the Spirit, the one who binds us together. Seek God in the silent dawn of morning and when the orange horizon embraces the close of each day. May God bless your sacred covenant and lead you in the ways of love. Amen.