

## "Be There At Our Homing"

Robert W. Bertram

[Sermon preached at the wedding of Jane Ralph and Peter Rehwaldt,  
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That is the line, that is the prayer, we are about to sing in the next hymn. I am sure that the hymn-writer did not intend the word "homing" to be a description of marriage. But it could serve as that. I cannot imagine a more apt expression of what goes on in a wedding than to call it a homing. The uniting of a man and a woman in marriage is the creating of a new home. This homing, so the hymn says, comes "at the eve of the day." For Jane and Peter a former day is now ending, the "day" of their singleness, of which they may well be tired and weary and from which they now turn to this new home of a life together.

But everything about the homing depends on who will "be there"; God, yes, but which God? A poet has said that home is the place which, when you go there, they will have to take you in. Another poet has said, yes, but that assumes that there is someone there to make it a home. (I got those quotes from Steve Kuhl.) We might say that at the homing of Jane and Peter it is important that God should be there, but what is all important is who that God is. Thereby hangs the homing. Isn't that the whole point of the hymn?

"Be there at our homing," "Lord of all kindliness." Notice who it is whom we are asking to be there at your homing: not just God in general, not just God the Creator who would be there anyway whether we ask for that or not, not just that Lord who creates all marriages, of Christians and non-Christians alike, not just that Maker of heaven and earth who joins together every wife-husband union that ever was and sternly warns any mere mortal who would presume to rend those unions asunder. True, that is the same God whom we too are addressing this evening, for there is only one God. But we are appealing to that God not just as the Maker of marriages.

God does make marriages, let us make no mistake about that. It is God finally who makes them, not just we or our promises or even our love. Sure, God does not make our marriages without us, without our promises, without our love, without very deeply implicating us in the relationship - up to our necks, and deeper than that. Even so, there is a great deal more to our marriages than what we bring to them, and so, more than we can ever take back from them. That is why a husband who divorces his wife is not simply single the way he was as a bachelor. There is something he cannot take back, something outstanding, an outstanding debt. He cannot absolve himself of that debt, nor even can his wife. Only the One who ultimately made that marriage can do that.

But that much is true also of husbands who stay married. Wives, too. The sheer successfulness of their marriages, the indescribable joy and security of belonging to each other, weathering year after year one storm after another as a partnership of love -- that, as they probably know better than anyone does, is bigger by far than both of them. As

Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said in a wedding sermon, "It is not your love that sustains your marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love." Your union owes its success not just to you-plus-you but to that Third Party who does the uniting.

Yes, but that is exactly the hitch: the marriage does owe its success to that One who subsidizes the marriage so lavishly that no human couple, however loving, could ever repay the debt but only falls farther and farther in arrears as the marriage gets better and better. "For all of which," says the catechism, "we are indebted to thank and to praise, to serve and obey him, this is most certainly true." Ah yes, Luther sighs, but who of us could ever pay off such overwhelming indebtedness? Precisely because of God who is there at our homing, it is also because of God, alas, that we so hopelessly continue to owe on that home. We are debtors, that is true, and no one more than the well married.

But isn't that the very reason Christians at a wedding sing as we now are about to do? It is not just the God to whom we owe our marriages, to whom we are indebted for our homing, whom we invite, please, to "be there." That God, alone, is a mixed blessing. Rather it is that God whom we invoke but who in Christ Jesus joins us, not only joins us together as an outside third party like a marriage broker but who joins in being married with us, joins in shouldering the immense obligation we incur in getting married, who joins in assuming the indebtedness with us, in other words who bears our cross as his own, who enlivens our bodies with his body and blood in The Marriage Supper, who forgives our debt and liberates us to face each other, husband and wife, not as burdened debtors but as paid-up, risk-taking, lavish and rollicking spenders -- spenders of ourselves.

"Lord of all kindness. Lord of all grace" - that is the God whom we invite. "Your hands swift to welcome, your arms to embrace," it is You, the triune God in Christ Jesus, whom we ask, please,

"Be there at our homing,  
and give us, we pray,  
your love in our hearts. Lord,  
at the eve of the day.

When you make the sign of the cross, Jane and Peter, when you make the sign of "the dear, holy Cross" over your marriage, you might think of that cross as the cross-hairs on a homing device designating your home as the target for that One who has promised to "be there," the "Lord of all kindness."

Wedding of Jane Ralph and Peter Rehwatdt  
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Robert W. Bertram, preacher

