

**+ Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 + In Christ, Three Is Better Than One +  
+ Wedding of Melissa Caffery and James Gregory +  
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 22 April 2017 +**

*This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it!*

Dear Family and Friends of the Bride and Groom, especially you dear James and Melissa,

We're finally here! No more need to count down days. No more need to make preparations and to make sure every detail is lined up. No more agree/disagree questions in pre-marital class—although as you know, none of us have all the answers to all the questions that come up in married life. We're finally here on this day you've been waiting for—your wedding day.

So now what? Where do you go from here? What happens once you turn around, swish-swish-swish, and walk out those doors? God-willing, you have a long road of marriage ahead of you. As you've come to see since the Lord used Sean to introduce you, it's not always going to be smooth and straight and level. Yes, there are going to be times when things are going to be absolutely amazing when the Lord's rich blessing is going to be so clear and so obvious that you can't help but rejoice. There are going to be times when fleeting moments will make you smile every time you remember them for the rest of your life. There are going to be times when you have to roll up your sleeves and put in the work that is necessary for marriage to thrive. There are also going to be times when things are challenging and hard, when you wonder whom you can lean on, when you realize how difficult life can be.

So what is the one thing you need most not just for all of those moments, but for this entire journey called marriage that you're starting today? I'm sure we could come up with good, yet different answers to that question. Trust? Love? Friendship? Honesty? Respect? All things that are vital for marriage, but maybe I need to reword the question. Not what, but who is the one thing you need most not just for all those moments—joyful and challenging, but also for this entire journey called marriage? You need Jesus! **READ TEXT.**

Did you catch the point that the writer was trying to make? **“Two are better than one...”** No doubt about that! If you have two people working together on a job or a project, you typically get more done. Sometimes you even get the job done faster. If you fall, a friend's helping hand is almost always appreciated. The writer even says, **“Pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!”** He even uses the example of keeping warm. It's much easier to keep warm with two than one! If you go to war, as you have James, or if you need to defend yourself, two is better than one. Why is that?

**“A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.”** Maybe you've heard the story. A father saw his kids arguing and fighting with each other while they were cleaning up brush in the backyard. The father called them over and handed a stick to his kids. “Break it.” It didn't take much effort for the stick to be broken. Then he picked up another stick and took two more. He tied all three sticks together tightly and handed them to his kids. “Break them.” They couldn't. The sticks together were stronger than the one by itself. The father wanted the kids to realize the importance of supporting each other and working together rather than fighting against each other. Together they would strengthen each other and the Lord would provide even greater blessing.

So what does this little life lesson have to do with your marriage? Other than providing a visual illustration for when you have kids, the Lord is making a very important point here. Marriage does not thrive, does not grow, and does not remain healthy if you treat it as if it's all about me, myself, and I. This marriage can't just be about you, James. This marriage can't just be about you, Melissa. If it is, it won't last. It won't grow. It won't thrive. It's a trap that many couples fall into. Why? Because inside each and every one of us here is the natural inclination to put myself and what I want ahead of everyone else, even my spouse. When marriage is all about me and not us, it breaks down. Trust crumbles into hurtful assumptions. Friendship gets warped into competition or hostility. Love rots into annoyance or animosity. Honesty and respect break down into lies, secrets, and a me-first disrespect. So how can you avoid that trap, that great big pothole on this journey called marriage?

Yes, the writer of Ecclesiastes tells us, **“Two are better than one,”** but three is best! You don't just need love for each other. You need God's selfless, undeserved love for you in Jesus. We heard it earlier in John's first letter (4:9-11). **“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”** Just last weekend, we celebrated God's tremendous love for sinners like you and me. We saw God's selfless love poured out for us as Jesus faced suffering. We saw God's forgiving love as Jesus went to the cross

and died, and we saw God's eternal love as Jesus conquered death and abandoned the tomb so you could be confident that you have eternal life in heaven waiting for you. God showed that tremendous love to you and me through our Savior Jesus. Through the water and Word of Baptism, God connected both of you to his love through Jesus and made you beloved members of his family. James, you are God's beloved son. Melissa, you are God's beloved daughter—and that impacts your marriage!

As beloved members of God's family, Christ Jesus becomes the center of your marriage. He becomes the heart and core of your marriage. God's love for you in Christ impacts the family decisions you make. God's love for you in Christ affects how you carry out your God-given callings as husband and wife. God's love for you in Christ also serves as a constant reminder that you're never alone no matter the situation, that you are three and not just two.

So what does a marriage centered on Christ—a union of three and not just two—look like? With Christ at the center of your marriage, your love for each other will reflect God's love for you as we heard in the first Bible reading. ***“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs...It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”*** (1 Corinthians 13:4,5,7) That's a big responsibility!

The truth is, even with Christ as the center of your marriage, you're still going to be impatient. There are still going to be times when you're going to be thoughtless and envious and rude and proud and even self-seeking. You'll have amazing photographic memory when it comes to each other's wrongs. There will be times when you fail each other, but that's why it's so important to remember God's love for you in Christ. With Christ as the center of your marriage, you forgive each as Christ forgave you. Remember talking about that in class? Confessing your sins to each other and forgiving each other is one of the most important marriage tools you can have. Through his Word, Christ helps you to establish a climate of forgiveness and peace and true hope in your marriage and in your family as you raise any children God gives you.

With Christ as the center of your marriage, he provides a firm foundation that helps you weather life's toughest storms. With Christ as the center of your marriage, he will enable you to see his gracious and guiding hand in the good times and the bad, in times of joy and times of sorrow, during the longest days when life seems uncertain and the shortest nights before your children are born if that is his will. Jesus becomes the center of your marriage and of your family when you regularly spend time with him in his Word as a couple and as a family—in worship at home and at church, as you bring your kids to be baptized and to learn God's Word and as you yourselves grow through the study of God's Word. With Christ as the center of your marriage, he is present when you wake up and when you lie down; when you gather for meals and when you relax. With Christ as the center of your marriage, he enables you to carry out your God-given callings of husband and wife, head and helper as God established them in the Garden of Eden—James with self-sacrificing love for Melissa modeled after Christ's love for us, and Melissa with submissive love for James modeled after the Church's love for Christ. With Christ as the center of your marriage, he will cause trust and love and honesty and respect for one another to grow and thrive, and he will bless you with his grace in ways that you can't possibly imagine today.

James and Melissa, it's been a true joy to see you grow together and grow in Jesus these past couple years. Now it's time for you to begin traveling down that long road the Lord has before you. As you travel together, don't try to go solo. Instead go with Jesus, who loves you more than you can imagine, who goes with you, and who will bless you. That's our prayer for you. May Christ bless and be at the heart of your marriage always! Amen.