

## FIRST AND CENTER

### Pastor's Blog

May 31, 2018

Yesterday, on the 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my marriage to my husband, Gavin, I met with a couple who is planning to marry this year. Coincidence, but a great opportunity to reflect on marriage for a few lines.

How in heaven's name can those of us who have been married for some years speak to those who are just beginning the process in this day and time? So much has changed. It is tempting to complain at length upon a throw-away culture where people seem to end marriages when something goes wrong instead of working to fix it. Or bemoan a "Say Yes to the Dress" culture, where folk will spend tens of thousands of dollars on a wedding, but little time or money on truly caring for the relationship. Or complain that many people don't bother to get married at all because, well, who knows? The wedding is too expensive (see above)? They are afraid of making a lifetime commitment, to anything or anyone? The institution seems old-fashioned and unnecessary?

Okay, now I've gotten that out of my system. What I often say at weddings is that getting married is very much a counter-cultural thing to do these days. Not the wedding, but the commitment to spend a lifetime as someone's partner "in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow." I don't want to talk about how marriages break up, or why or when they should or shouldn't. Rather, I encourage us to think about *how they stay together*. Marriages and families are practice spaces for how we can relate to all kinds of people in our lives. Our homes are places to practice undeserved forgiveness, daily kindness, giving without always expecting an equal gift in return, paying deep attention to someone else to understand their needs, joys, and sorrows. True mutuality. Marriages that make it most often involve people who talk TO one another, not AT one another. And that means talking TO one another in sentences longer than tweets, while looking one another in the face. And that means talking about the day-to-day stuff that needs tending, but also talking about thoughts on the world as it is and as it might be, and about hopes and dreams for the future. Strong marriages are primers in the art of conversation and listening. When I do pre-marital counseling, I know that if those who want to marry know a couple who have that kind of strong marriage, there is more of a chance the new marriage will succeed.

If you're married, how about doing a check-in with your spouse today to see how things are going? If you are not married but are in a relationship, do the same. Actually, all of us, not matter our marital status, have relationships with family and friends that could benefit from that kind of a check in...including our relationship with God. Prayer is actually checking in on that relationship, not just a list of wants, needs, or demands. Let's take some time away from whatever distracts to care for the most precious parts of our lives: our relationships.



~ The Rev. Shelly Stackhouse  
Transitional Minister