



Mary Straiton Robert Clews

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1 Corinthians 13:1, 4-8a; John 2:1-11

A few weeks back, as some of you know, I was in Canberra for the marriage of a young couple, one of whom I have known since she was ten years old. Just outside the backdoor of the hotel there was a bookshop, and, as I hadn't bought a book in about 36 hours, you can guess what happened. The book I picked up is by the winner of the 2010 Man Booker Prize, Howard Jacobson, but this was not one of his novels. This book is a collection of columns written for *The Independent* newspaper, and I would probably have bought it anyway, but what clinched the deal was that it fell open in my hands at these words – *Three cheers for mature love, I say. If we are to have marriages then let them be between mature peoples only. Marriage, like love, is wasted on the young. If we were sensible we would make it illegal to marry, or indeed to fall in love, the baby side of fifty.* At that moment I knew I had to have Jacobson's book, but absolute confirmation came just a few sentences later. *Seeing the famous newsreels again of Charles and Diana answering the question of whether they are in love – of course we are, says Diana; whatever in love means, says the Prince – it is hard not to shake one's head in sorrow over both of them. The truth is, they were so unevolved when they underwent the ordeal of declaring their love on television – mere embryos of people they look now, not a wrinkle of knowledge or understanding between them – that neither could have had an inkling of what love meant.*

Today's celebration, clearly, is a Howard Jacobson occasion. This is an event he would wholeheartedly approve, for we are here to celebrate lots of wrinkles of knowledge and understanding, rejoicing in the fact that with lifetimes of maturity between them, and beyond the trauma and loneliness of losing partners of many years, Mary and Bob have found each other and are finding happiness and new life together. These two are not mere embryos of people, and this means that the vows they make today mean so much more than words tripping a little too easily off the tongues of many on the baby side of fifty. Nevertheless, what I want to say to Mary and Bob today is almost word for word what I said to those young friends a few weeks ago.

From time immemorial, marriage has been seen as having two great purposes – first the conception, birth and nurturing of children; and, secondly, the right ordering of sexual love.

When Mary and Bob first stood where they stand today, these are the words they heard – *Holy matrimonie, is an honourable estate instituted by God in paradise, in the time of mannes innocency, signifying unto us the misticall union that is betwixt Christe and his Church: which holy estate, Christe adorned and beutified by his presence, and first miracle that he wrought in Cana of Galilee, and is commended by Saint Paule to be honourable among all men; and therefore is not to bee enterprised, nor taken in hande unadvisedlye, lightelye, or wantonly, to satisfie mens carnal lustes and appetites, like brute beasts that haue no understanding: but reuerently, discretely, aduisedly, soberly, and in the feare of God. Duley considering the causes for the whiche matrominie was ordained. One cause was the procreacion of children, to be brought up in the fere and nurture of the Lord, and prayse to God. Secondly it was ordained for a remedie against sinne, and to avoid fornicacion, that suche persones as bee married, might lieu chastlie in matrimonie, and kepe themselues undefiled members of Christes boyde.*

To these two traditional understandings of marriage, rather quaintly expressed to our ears, but fairly unexceptional in 1549, the first married Archbishop of Canterbury added another - *Thirdlye for the mutuall societie, helpe, and comfort that the one oughte to haue of thother, both in prosperetie and aduersitie.* As Archbishop Cranmer's most recent biographer remarks, at the time he penned this third reason for marriage the archbishop had already enjoyed the mutual society, help, and comfort of Margaret Cranmer for thirteen years. He knew, as Mary and Bob know, that marriage is all about having and holding each other. This is what we do, it has been said, we hold each other. Human beings are not made to be alone, we are made for what can best be called called 'in-othering' - we are made for sharing, for mutuality, for shared joy in prosperity and strength in adversity. This is why we honour marriage so highly, and this is the best reason for extending the definition of marriage to embrace same-sex couples. So it is that we rejoice with Mary and Bob today, blessing all that has been and all that shall be, confident that in holding together all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well. For marriage is about saying Yes to one another, saying Yes to life, Yes to the world, Yes to the all the days leading up to this day, and Yes to whatever the future holds. *Three cheers for mature love,* Howard Jacobson says. *Give me Antony, long out of boyhood, and Cleopatra, no longer green in judgement, any time. It's not just because Shakespeare himself was older when he wrote it that Antony and Cleopatra is a greater play than Romeo and Juliet. It's because in the wisdom of his years he chose to write of wiser lovers.* Conversation, Jacobson believes, is the key to true love, conversation and companionship, what Archbishop Cranmer calls 'society.' From this day forward, you have each other and you hold each other, yoked together for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness, and in health, to love and to cherish, for as long as you both shall live. May you be worthy of one another's best, and tender with one another's dreams.



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