
Tight Lines

A Wedding Homily for Liz Caffey and Will Ellis

by The Rev. Canon George M. Maxwell, Jr.

In his letter to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul offers us this encouragement:

“As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another, and forgive each other... Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts... And be thankful.”

It is a vision of life together woven out of virtues—compassion, kindness, humility, and patience—and bound together by love. Not an abstract ideal, but a very practical way of living: forgiving, bearing with each other, letting Christ’s peace guide your choices.

It reminds me of our conversations about fly fishing!

Liz and Will both know their way around a fly rod. Liz may not want an audience when she’s casting, but she knows what she’s doing—and I hear she’s far less shy when she must use both hands to hold up the cut she’s just landed! Will promised me trophy rainbows and browns on the San Juan if I kept this homily under ten minutes.

Fly fishing, like marriage, teaches humility as you enter the stream, trust as you cast into the current, and patience as you wait for what may come. Those same qualities are invaluable in nurturing a joyful life together.

Entering the Stream

The first lesson in fly fishing is to pause. You study the stream before you step in. You notice where the current runs fast, where it pools quietly, where a ripple hints at life below. You can’t rush in; you enter gently, with humility.

Marriage is much the same. Today, you step into a new stream together. You’ve prepared, but you don’t yet know all its currents. Love calls you not to charge ahead, but to enter with openness and humility. Just as an angler learns to read the water, you will learn the rhythms of each other’s hearts -- the swift currents, the quiet pools. You will not master them, but you will learn to cherish them.

That is what Paul means when he says, “clothe yourselves with humility and patience.” You cannot love well without first pausing, noticing, and honoring what you see in the other.

The Cast

Casting a fly is an art. Too much force, and the line tangles. Too little, and it falls short. The cast requires balance and timing, a rhythm of holding and releasing. You keep the line for a moment, and then you let it go.

Love works the same way. You will hold one another in times of fear or grief, and you will release one another to grow, to take risks, to become fully yourselves. Marriage is not about possession; it’s about companionship. It is knowing when to draw close and when to give space. Like a good cast, it is both deliberate and free.

Casting is also an act of trust. You send the line out not knowing exactly how the current will carry it, but you trust the water to do its work. In the same way, you cast your love out repeatedly, not to control the outcome, but to trust that love itself is enough. That is what it means to be rooted and grounded in love: to have the steadiness to keep casting, and the faith to let the river carry it where it will.

Waiting with Patience

Most of fishing is waiting. You cast and wait. You mend the line and wait. You watch the drift and wait. Sometimes hours pass with nothing. Yet the waiting is not wasted -- it is the heart of practice. It teaches you to notice the smallest change in the water, the shift of light, the breeze through the trees.

Marriage will also bring long stretches of waiting -- for clarity, for change, and for healing. These are not wasted seasons. They will teach patience and attention: to notice God's presence in small things, to see love in subtle gestures. Love grows deepest not in fireworks but in patient presence.

That's why Paul says, "Bear with one another." It takes patience to keep showing up, especially when nothing is happening.

The Tug of Grace

And then, suddenly, there it is -- the tug on the line. A trout rises, quick and shimmering. For a moment time stands still. No amount of skill guarantees it. A trout on the line is always gift, always grace.

Marriage will be full of such moments: unexpected laughter in the middle of an argument, a hand reaching for yours without thinking, a moment of awe you share -- a sunrise, a child's first step, the sheer mystery of being alive together. You cannot manufacture these moments. You can only receive them as grace.

Paul says, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, and be thankful." Gratitude is how we hold these moments. They remind us that life is gift, not possession.

The Release

I know that you typically practice catch-and-release. You marvel at the fish, hold it for a moment, and then let it go, grateful for the encounter.

So it is in marriage. You do not own one another. You are not trophies to be caught and displayed. You are God's beloved, entrusted to one another's care. Love is not about clinging; it is about daily discovery of beauty, mystery, and depth.

That is why forgiveness matters. That is why bearing with one another matters. You will hurt each other, and you will need to let go—release the hurt, release the need to be right, release the temptation to keep score. "Forgive each other," Paul says, "just as the Lord has forgiven you."

Wonder

At the heart of both fishing and marriage is wonder: wonder at a trout flashing in the sun, wonder at the mystery of another person's soul, wonder at the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. This wonder will carry you, sustain you, and remind you that life together is always a gift.

And so, as you begin this lifelong day on the river, may your skies be fair, your love rise often, and your lines stay tight.

Amen.
