
Set Me as a Seal

**A Wedding Homily for Katherine Cook and Evan Thomas
by the Rev. Canon George Maxwell**

Song of Solomon 2:10–13; 8:6–7

Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Hear where the Song begins: with a voice. Before there is a couple, there is a calling — a word spoken across the garden, *come away* — and the beloved is drawn out into the spring by a summons that reached her before she spoke a word. The flowers appear, the time of singing comes, and love arrives the way morning does, as a gift to the one it wakes. In the Bible's great love poem, love is a thing you answer before it is anything you achieve.

And then, near the end, the Song says the word it has been moving toward all along. *Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm.*

A seal is pressed upon you, and then it is worn. In the old world it was how a thing was claimed — a mark stamped from outside, naming whose it was. A signet pressed into warm wax. A ring worn on the hand. Each was a sign of belonging. So hear what the Song is asking for: to be set on you, worn on the heart and worn on the arm, a love laid upon the two of you from beyond the two of you, a love God gives, and God carries with you. Kitty, Evan, the love that holds a marriage is the love of God, set on you like a seal; and your work, across a lifetime, is simply to wear it. In a few minutes you will place a ring on each other's hand. That ring is a seal: the sign of a belonging God has already settled.

Which changes everything the Song says next. *Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it.* On a wedding day it is tempting to hear that as a dare — that your love must now be strong enough to hold back every flood. That is more than any two people can promise, and the Song is telling you something gentler: what a seal is like. The waters come; everyone who has loved for long knows the waters come. And the mark holds — because the One who set it there is faithful, whatever the strength of the ones who wear it.

Then the Song says the boldest thing of all. *If one offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.* Love cannot be bought; it is gift, from first to last. That may be the kindest news there is, because the love holding you rests on God's faithfulness. The seal is grace, worn where everyone can see.

In a few moments the Church will pray over you words worth listening for, because they are this same word turned into a blessing: *Let their love for each other be a seal upon their hearts, a mantle about their shoulders, and a crown upon their foreheads.* A seal on the heart. A mantle on the shoulders — for warmth, and for weight, the way love is always both. And a crown upon the brow: the crown God sets on those in whom he delights, because delight, too, is gift.

So let me send you out with the blessing the Song and the Prayer Book are both reaching for.

Wear this love as a seal upon your hearts, for it is God's gift, and it holds you fast.

Wear it as a mantle upon your shoulders, for warmth when the way grows cold, and for weight when love asks something of you.

And wear it as a crown, all your life long, until you come at last to the table where the saints feast forever, and the One who sealed you says, as he has said from the very beginning: *Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.*

Amen.

© *The Cathedral of St. Philip*. All rights reserved.