
The Two Most Important Words at Weddings

**An article for *The Cathedral Times*
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler, *Dean of the Cathedral*
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The two most important words in the wedding ceremony are not “I do.” Read on for the explanation!

We have begun the month of May, and weddings are upon us. Of course, there is no single time of year that is the right one for getting married. We celebrate weddings at the church all times of year. But we sure do seem to arrange, and to think about, weddings, in the late spring and summer months.

I love weddings! And I love marriages even more! I have been to some wonderful weddings in my lifetime. And so have you. We have gathered from hither and yon to witness, and to bless, two honorable people in holy matrimony, all over the place. Some weddings have been in backyards. Some have been in community centers. Some have been on beaches; some have been on mountains. And some, of course, have been in our churches, those holy places that have witnessed the most joyous moments of our lives. One of the reasons I love church weddings is because churches are also where we go for funerals. The place we share holy sadness is also the place we share holy joy. Our churches can handle both deep sadness and deep joy. We are better for it.

And so, this time of year, I give thanks for all of you who are getting married (wherever the place might be). And I give thanks for all of us who have made that commitment of marriage! Thank you for getting married! Even if it was many years ago, thank you for getting married! You showed the world commitment and faithfulness, and loyalty and love.

In marriage, we are participating in something that not only blesses us, but is also blessing the whole world. The world is blessed when we witness two persons will their lives to each other. The world needs to see and believe that such loving commitment can happen.

We all realize, by now, that weddings are far different from marriages. A wedding is only the outward sign of a deep inner commitment, that deeper commitment which is marriage itself. Marriage – that vow of committed love between two persons—makes you better and it makes the world better. There may be no deeper decision most of us make. Weddings are the outward sign of an inner marriage.

And commitment is hard! Yes, “falling in love” is wonderful, and I hope we all fall in love, over and over again! However, “falling in love” is not what keeps us married. It is the will, the will to commit and the will to love, that keeps us deeply married.

Thus, the two most important words in the wedding ceremony are not “I do.” The two most important words in the wedding ceremony are, “I will.” They occur early in the service, before the vows, in that section of the service we call the “declaration of consent:”

Will you have this person to be your wife/husband; to live together in the covenant of marriage? Will you love this person, comfort them, honor and keep them, in sickness and in health; and, forsaking all others, be faithful to them as long as you both shall live? I will. (from The Book of Common Prayer, page 424).

These lines are not the actual marriage vows of our prayer book. By these lines, we ascertain that the couple is getting married of their own “free will.” The answer we give, “I will,” is perhaps the most powerful part of the service. Marriage is about love, for sure; but it is also about “willing” to love, “willing” to honor, comfort, and keep. In marriage, we will something. We want that something to happen. We intend it. We work for it.

Blessed weddings to so many in this season! And blessed anniversaries, throughout the year, to all who are married. Thank you for your love. Thank you for committing yourself to another person. And thank you for your will to love and to honor, through thick and thin, through ups and downs, and through life. Your will to love is a witness to the world! The world honors your commitment to will and to love.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip