Colossians 3:12-4:2 **Scott MALCOLM**

I have a problem; I have been asked to take a wedding in a few weeks and I’m at a loss as to what to say. This doesn’t happen to me very often as I have a good routine for getting up a sermon, and at the end of that routine, I usually have something to talk about. Whether it’s worth listening too is another story, but I can come up with something to say.

This time I feel quite out of sorts.

I feel very honoured having been asked to take this wedding, as it’s a friend of mine, who I care about. I don’t know his partner very well, but she seems lovely and I’m sure he has made an excellent decision in his chose of life partner.

They are both younger than me. He has never been married, she has and has two lovely kids. A boy and a girl. I’ve never married a couple in this situation before. One full of hope for the future, not having any idea what they are getting in to, and the other full of hope … but knowing that it doesn’t always work out.

Both are Christians and very sensible people.

I believe in marriage. I think it’s a marvellous institution. But in recent years it seems to have run in to some difficulties, especially what we have called Christian marriage. Pressure has come from both outside and inside the church when we speak of getting married.

From outside in the form of people other than traditional genders wanting to get married. Men and men and woman and woman, and now people of transgender identity waiting to tie the knot in a marriage ceremony.

It’s funny in some ways, that as Christians who have always been critical of people not getting married, when they want to, we decide that we don’t think they should!

From inside the church, we have critiques of the patriarchal stance of what constitutes Christian marriage. Wives, submit to your husbands. That kind of thing. And without doubt, there has been a lot of instances where this has been used in an abusive context, that is for sure.

I can remember after I left Ashburton Baptist, Janet and I went back up north to lick our wounds and we got re-involved in a Baptist church up there, and there a blended family, Mum and two daughters, Dad and a son I think, who attended, and had gotten married. They were converts and felt that it was the right thing to do. The trouble was Dad was violent and couldn’t control his temper. I was dismayed to hear the Minister and Elders say that the wife wasn’t allowed to leave, as she should forgive him, and submit to God and God would work it out!

It was rubbish theology and an even worse practise of what is called … justice.

Marriage has its problems, or perhaps better said, Marriage, especially Christian marriage has its perception problems.

Which is why I’m having trouble getting my head around what to say at my friend’s wedding. I’m thinking about them, about the crowd, about the parents of the married couple, about the mix of believing and non-believing people present, and there will be other clergy there as well. So, I’m struggling a little.

How do I capture what it’s like to look across the sofa and see the same person who has sat there for the past 45 years, the same person who has held you, loved you, supported you and shared with you all that life has been for you both, how do I capture that bond? How do I capture it without offending those that have never been married?

How do I articulate the feeling of being more than yourself, when you stand on the side-line with your wife at your grandson’s soccer game, or sit at the table all playing together with your younger granddaughter, how do I articulate that moment of transcendence? How do I articulate that without offending those that have never had children or grandchildren?

How do I explain that as grindingly hard as it is sometimes, as excruciatingly difficult, that it’s worth it if you can survive and hold on, and that when it comes right you wouldn’t trade it for all the riches of the world? How can I explain that without offending those whose marriages have not survived those harsh and difficult times, especially those for whom that was impossible? How can I explain that?

Perhaps what I could do is forget about all these other things, and instead focus on the two people themselves, and simply tell them to “clothe themselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience. That they are to bear with one another and if they make a mistake, they are to forgive each other, as far as that is possible. That they are to wear love like a garment, and always seek the peace of Jesus so that their responses towards one another are gentle and loving. That they be grateful. For one another, for all the gifts that life will give them, and to be patient and strong for one another when this doesn’t happen and difficulties arise.

That they should continue in their love of the Lord Jesus, praying, reading the bible and seeking after him, learning together and making wise decisions. That they should as best they can, stay close to one another and to God … and that in everything, they should do as they would want it done to them. Doing it all in the name of Jesus, and being grateful for it all.

Perhaps that would be a good thing.

Amen.