

## Bloody Marriage

Marriage is messy business. So much so that Jesus allowed Himself to get messed up for us. He shed blood to reveal our starting point as spouses: 'O God, the love I desire to give, I do not!' Or more accurately, I cannot. Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.

Annette and I just finished leading a round of [Beauty and the Breach](#), an 8-week course in which we invite frustrated couples to discover the Cross together through merciful exchanges of blessing, sin, and need. Each couple bore distinct wounds but faced a common block in offering themselves freely to the other. We placed a big Cross in the middle of our gathering as a reminder that Jesus' covenant with us—His commitment to the marriage--supersedes our own; we stirred up the faith that somehow His blood could bore through the debris obscuring our true selves from the other. His Cross also reminded us that when it came to expressing hard stuff to the other, or hearing hard stuff, we could pick up our little crosses and endure shame and pain for the joy set before us.

Some of the couples could point to big historic sins as contributors to the current breach. A few had thought 'marriage' might cure sexual addiction or same-sex attraction or deep-seated fears; in truth, they realized that a good marriage exposes before it absolves. In a previous group, one woman expressed how her husband's confession of a litany of sexual sins may have been in his words 'a resurrection' but for her, it was the beginning of a slow, long crucifixion. She had to die to what she thought her life would be. A source of security had become a threat; her closest walking partner, a dangerous sinner. How to love? 'Lord, have mercy on me, sinner...'

I am not being romantic here. All sin is not created equal and certain betrayals require solid boundaries in order to protect the betrayed and provoke genuine repentance on the part of the obvious sinner. But it also invites the offended party to reckon with his or her limited love—the way (s)he loves according to contract, because the other keeps his or her end of the marital deal and thus justifies one's love. When that contract is broken, one feels justified in breaking vows. But we marry based on covenant, the truth that we invoked the ONE who shed blood to grant us the mercy needed to extend mercy, especially to the sinner we're sleeping with.

During our last night at Beauty and the Breach, the Spirit directed me to Luke 18: 9-14 where Jesus gives wise counsel to any 'confident of their own righteousness' (v.9), namely the Pharisee who thanked God for not making him an adulterer. Next to him at church was such an adulterer who simply cried out for mercy. God saved only the latter (v. 14). My prayer? That the Cross reveal to all spouses our inability to love the other as we should. May mercy come quickly to meet former Pharisees and former prostitutes who marry; may the bloody God be glorified on such broken, level and ultimately beautiful ground.