

## **The Marriage of Peter Robison and Courtney Ashford**

July 6, 2013

### **The Gathering**

A string quartet plays as family members are seated and others gather quietly in the wedding venue.

### **The Processional**

The mothers enter and light the two smaller candles. Jim and Pete then enter with the rest of the wedding party following behind. Once settled up front, Rod and Courtney enter, stopping at the base of the steps. Courtney takes the final step to her marriage on her own. Finally, Nora, the flower girl -- and a toddler -- walks down the aisle to complete the procession.

### **The Gift of Marriage**

On behalf of Pete and Courtney, their families, and our hosts Joe and Ruth Kenoyer, welcome to the most important day in the life of Peter Robison and Courtney Ashford. Thank you for being here today.

If you've not done so already, please silence your cell phones. And please be discrete if you want to take a picture or two. Let's honor the moment. We are here to behold and celebrate Courtney and Pete as they discover the unity of marriage.

### **Remembering Loved Ones**

As we begin, we want to honor some very important people in our lives. First, Dean Robison, thank you for being with us today. It is terrific to have four generations of Robisons with us to mark this special day. We are sorry that your wife Helen could not be here as well. Of course, she is with us in spirit.

We also want to honor the memories of a few other very special people in our lives. Let's pause and remember what each one meant to us.

John and Mary Davis...  
Charlotte Lefert...  
Joe and Skippy Gregory...  
John and Rose Ashford...

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Joshua Margolis, Hammed Olabode Ojugbele, Dayna Reid, the author of *Sacred Ceremony: Create and Officiate Personalized Wedding Ceremonies*, Rev. Melissa Anne Rogers, and Rev. Joanne Thomson for sharing your understanding of wedding ceremonies with me.

While they are no longer with us in person, they are absolutely here in our hearts. They would love everything about today. We miss them dearly.

### **A Marriage Meditation**

To be married today is an audacious act. Even a courageous one. It takes real strength to stand against the tide. The U.S. marriage rate is now at its lowest point in recorded history. Nearly half of America's 20-somethings say that marriage is becoming obsolete. And the evidence suggests that they may be right. The cohabitation rate has increased by over 1600 percent since I was a kid. More than half the children born today are born to people outside of marriage. And more than a quarter of the mothers with two or more children have had their children with two or more fathers. Such is life these days. Pete and Courtney do not \*have\* to be married. And yet, here they stand looking to do just that. What is marriage?

A marriage is many things, first among them is commitment. Let's think about durable commitments. Commitments are the strongest when they are made freely. As I said, Pete and Courtney stand against the tide. Second, commitments are strong when they are irrevocable, when the individuals making those commitments understand the high cost of breaking them. And finally, they are strong when they are made publicly, especially in front of loved ones. Courtney and Pete stand here today ready to say out loud -- to their very best friends and entire family -- that they will commit to each other for the rest of their lives. Our presence today testifies to the power of their commitment.

Of course, marriage is also about love -- a special love. We've known for thousands of years that love comes in four flavors. Each is essential. There is Eros, the sensual, erotic and physical love that we all know. Then there is what might be called brotherly love. We know that too. This is the love born of shared experience and real friendship. These woods are filled with such friendships today. There is the love of country, community, and family. Each has its own kind of patriotism. We can feel that love among us right now. And then there is the fourth kind, what Aristotle called "agape." This might be called pure love. This is the absolute, unconditional love given with no expectation of receiving anything in return. A mother feels it when she first holds her newborn baby. Those of us who feel a divine presence in the world believe that our God loves us so. This is the real deal.

If we are lucky in life, we will find a sensual relationship, best friends, and a connection to something bigger than ourselves. For many, that's enough. I'm hoping that the 15 million couples now living together in America have all three. But agape is rare. The free, irrevocable and very public commitment that Courtney and Pete are about to make to each other offers the only sure path to it.

We often hear that love is patient. It is, but there is more to patience than dealing with a toddler's tantrums, an adolescent's self-righteousness, and a spouse's clothes left on the floor. Agape comes with time. It comes with a lifetime of experience ... born in moments of pure joy, and unfortunately, real pain and sometimes heartbreaking loss. You can feel it in the comfortable silence between a long-married couple.

There's a paradox here. The picture I painted a few minutes ago is a picture of a people longing for a sturdy sense of self and real freedom in a changing world. Some see marriage as obsolete because of the constraints they think it imposes on them. Pete and Courtney know better. They know that we find real freedom and identity in commitment. People can only feel safe and secure to be themselves when they know that someone has their back. Such people move freely, confidently, and securely in the world because someone loves them ... and loves them unconditionally.

Courtney and Pete, you are an inspiration. Let's marry you two!

### **The Declaration of Intent**

Pete and Courtney, please turn and face each other.

### **The Bride and Groom**

Courtney and Pete, today you show us that the three words "I love you" are profound and consequential. They embody your unconditional commitment to each other. Understanding fully what it means to be joined in life and love, I ask you to declare that you are ready to marry:

- Pete, do you choose to marry Courtney, to take her to be your wife, to love and to cherish in the bond of marriage? "I do"
- Courtney, do you choose to marry Pete, to take him to be your husband, to love and to cherish in the bond of marriage? "I do"

### **The Parents**

Now please turn to face your family and friends.

Will Pete and Courtney's parents please stand?

You brought Pete and Courtney into this world, nurtured them, and helped to shape them into the people that stand here today. From the moment you anticipated their birth, you devoted yourself to raise them to adulthood. And now, being so deeply loved, they are prepared to so love. They are extraordinarily grateful to you for your love and support, for your sacrifices and patience, and for the respect you hold for them now as adults.

While your relationship will change today, you remain as important to them as ever. You will continue to bless, support, and respect them -- learning together how best to love each other in the years ahead.

- Rod and Joyce, John and Laura, as you witness and celebrate the vows that Pete and Courtney are about to make, do you promise to love them, to support them, and to do everything in your power to uphold them in their marriage? If so, please answer we do. "We do."

## **Extended Family and Friends**

Would everyone else please stand?

Extended family and friends – as you witness their coming wedding vows know that Pete and Courtney love you. Know too that you are not just here to witness this event. You are here as full participants in the ceremony, just as you have been full participants in their lives. They are grateful for the ways you’ve taught and mentored them, encouraged them, and simply walked beside them in life. Your blessing and support will sustain them in their new life together.

And so, I ask all of you -- as witnesses and participants -- will you be there for them in the coming years? Will you lend them your acceptance, your friendship, and your support – and in turn, welcome their friendship and support? If so, please answer we will. “We will.”

Please be seated.

### **Reading**

To mark this moment, Pete and Courtney asked Julia, Pete’s sister, to share these favorite words (from Pablo Neruda). Julia...

Of everything I have seen,  
it's you I want to go on seeing:  
of everything I've touched,  
it's your flesh I want to go on touching.  
I love your orange laughter.  
I am moved by the sight of you sleeping.

What am I to do, love, loved one?  
I don't know how others love  
or how people loved in the past.  
I live, watching you, loving you.  
Being in love is my nature.  
You please me more each afternoon.

That's why I love you and yet not why.  
There are so many reasons, and yet so few,  
for love has to be so,  
involving and general,  
particular and terrifying,  
joyful and grieving,  
flowering like the stars,  
and measureless as a kiss.

## **The Unity Candle Ceremony**

Recalling Aristotle's wisdom again, he once said, "Love is composed of a single soul inhabiting two bodies." The lighting of a unity candle symbolizes the birth of this soul. These three candles symbolize the union of your marriage. The two outer ones, lit by your mothers before the ceremony, represent the two of you, the strong and unique individuals that you are. The center candle, which you will light together, represents your collective soul, the unity that will define you in the years ahead.

Please light the large center candle from the smaller ones. And please, do not blow out your individual candles. Even in unity, you remain the wonderful individuals you are.

## **The Exchange of Vows**

- A wedding vow is a solemn promise. It is best for the bride and groom to write their vows. After all, this is their marriage. These words capture Pete and Courtney's promises to each other.

Pete and Courtney, listen carefully as you say and hear these promises. Please say to each other these words:

- I, Peter Robison, take you Courtney Ashford to be my wife, my partner in life and my one true love. I will grow with you, I will support your goals, and I will encourage you to be happy and healthy. I will trust, listen to you, and respect you. I will laugh with you and cry with you, loving you faithfully through good times and bad, regardless of the obstacles we will face together. I give you my hand, my heart, and my love, from this day forward for as long as we both shall live.
- I, Courtney Ashford, take you Peter Robison to be my husband, my partner in life and my one true love. I will grow with you, I will support your goals, and I will encourage you to be happy and healthy. I will trust, listen to you, and respect you. I will laugh with you and cry with you, loving you faithfully through good times and bad, regardless of the obstacles we will face together. I give you my hand, my heart, and my love, from this day forward for as long as we both shall live.

## **The Rings**

Wedding rings are public symbols of attachment and fidelity. They are the traditional symbols of marriage because as circles, they have no beginning or end. They represent an eternal and infinite love. Having exchanged your vows, it is now time to affirm your love and commitment with the exchange of rings.

May I have the rings?

Pete, as you place this ring on Courtney's finger, please say to her these words:

- With this ring, I thee wed. I take you to be my wife, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, to honor and respect, forsaking all others. I promise to love you and care for you, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse, from this day forward.

Courtney, as you place this ring on Pete's finger, please say to him these words:

- With this ring, I thee wed. I take you to be my husband, to have and to hold, to love and to cherish, to honor and respect, forsaking all others. I promise to love you and care for you, in sickness and in health, for richer or for poorer, for better or for worse, from this day forward.

These rings are the public expression of your vows. May they forever remind you that your lives are bound together by devotion and faithfulness.

### **A Marriage Blessing**

Let's pause and bless this marriage...

May God be with you and bless you.  
May you see your children's children,  
be poor in misfortune, and rich in blessings.  
May your joy be lasting and sorrow fleeting,  
from this day forward.

### **Declaration of Marriage**

Pete and Courtney, you have given your truest vows to one another in the presence of those you love and those who love you. According to the laws of the State of Oregon, and by the power of your love, I declare you to be husband and wife.

You may seal this union with a kiss.

It is my pleasure to introduce to you, Peter and Courtney Robison, husband and wife!

