

WORDS FROM THE WILDERNESS

Establishing a Prayer Team To Share God's Heart to Reach the Lost

Weddings Are Fun

As a pastor, I have the privilege of walking alongside beloved people in the middle of some of their most memorable and emotional seasons of life. Sometimes that privilege is hard - Such as in the counseling room, or the emergency room, or at the grave. But sometimes, it is a lot of fun - Such as at weddings. We all know weddings can be fun (in a beautiful way, or a train wreck way). There's the beautiful decorations and the wedding party standing with their friends. There's the celebration afterwards, which often includes lots of crazy dances with names like the "Macarena" or the "Electric Slide." There's always that cringe-worthy toast from the crazy uncle that seems to be at every wedding. And of course, there's the wedding cake - Don't forget that delicious wedding cake!

All that is great. But as a pastor, my favorite part of a wedding, by far, is a moment that I have the privilege of witnessing from a special vantage point: It is when the bride, dressed in a beautiful dress and radiant in her joy, with a smile as wide as can be, stands at the back of the church and begins her walk down the aisle to meet her groom. When that moment occurs, tradition holds that everyone at the wedding stands, looks to the back, and watches the bride in her processional moment of glory and happiness. That is all wonderful and truly special. But at that moment, standing there next to him...I'm watching the groom! For me, nothing compares to the the incredible awesomeness of watching his face, his smile, his expression - the moment he sees her. That "wow" moment. That "I can't believe she is coming to meet me" moment. That "I love her so much, and now I get to be married to her" moment. It is beautiful. It is profound. It is emotional in ways that are hard to describe. And it is always my favorite moment of any wedding.

And in August, I got to share that moment with one of my sons. Standing with him at the front, I saw his bride, so incredibly beautiful and happy, standing at the other end of the aisle. And then I had the priceless privilege of being at his side and watching his reaction as she walked down to him. I saw his face light up. I saw his smile fill the room. And I saw as tears filled his eyes, and his lips quivered, as he was overcome with joy and emotion at the bride God had prepared for him. I was crying too, so happy for my son and my new daughter-in-law, and so thankful that I got to be at such a special, close vantage point to something that echoes with a meaning that is larger than eternity itself. For we who are believers know what a wedding is pointing to: A Bridegroom, Jesus, receiving, loving, and serving His bride, the church, who has been prepared for Him and who, through His love and grace, is beautiful, radiant, and perfect for Him. It truly is a sacred and profound moment, filled with meaning and beauty beyond words.



We want to be in the business of arranging weddings in Ocean Springs

No, I don't mean directly performing wedding ceremonies, although that may eventually come in the life of this new, young "church-in-embryo." But we are not going to start competing with Vegas for the "drive by wedding chapel, get hitched for \$50" business. Rather, I am talking about the far more beautiful, far greater privilege of helping to arrange introductions and connections between a bride and her Bridegroom!

That starts with our core group. Through this spring and summer, Stephanie and I have been welcoming a new, precious group of believers into our home on Sunday nights. Our first study together has been on Jesus' letters to the church (His bride) in Revelation 1-3, letters where Jesus pours out His heart, His hope, His call, and His plan for His bride, the church. We did that to help free this new group of believers from the preconceived agendas and expectations that we all



naturally bring to a new church. And we have used that study to see that there has never been a people more loved, ever in history, than the Bride of Jesus, the Church. Because our Divine Bridegroom has triumphed over sin and death, grace abounds to us. And, in turn, that fact has led us to ask questions like, "What does Jesus want for His church? And, "If a local church were to really surrender to the love and all that Her Bridegroom, Jesus, has for her, what would that look like in their purpose, passion and priorities? What would such a church look like and be like?"

We are just starting out with this core group of believers. Right now, we are about seven or eight family units, gathering together, and seeing the Lord add other believers to our midst. There is much that I hope for the future of this group. But nothing exceeds my hope that astonishment and gratitude for the love that our Bridegroom has shown us will fill our hearts and motivate our response to Him. And that such gratitude will then motivate the other side of our "wedding invitations":



Taking the good news of the gospel and of Jesus' love for His

bride to lost people in Ocean Springs. I believe, with all of my heart, that Jesus has His people, men and women He is calling to be part of His bride, even now among the lost people who fill Ocean Springs. It could be the punk rock guitarist whom I had lunch with just yesterday, a guy who talked to me about "Queers and Screeching Weasels"....but who also wondered out loud to me if, after years of wandering, his story can have a happy ending. It can be the bartender I listened to last week who told me that, even now in his 30's, everything he does is to try to earn the approval of his father, and who talked about how great it would be to hear a father (Father?) say, "I am proud of you, son." It could be the eighteen year old waitress Stephanie and I have befriended who told us that she may have to start working at an "adult" entertainment business. It could be the self-described "reluctant atheist" who told me recently, "You're not like any priest I've ever talked to before" (Hint: I'm not a priest!) and who then went on to say, "I enjoy our conversations, and a lot of my friends down here could benefit from what we are talk about....Have you ever thought about

starting a meeting so people can ask their questions and find answers?" (Hey, what a great idea!). Or it could be any of the nearly thirty individuals whom God is already placing in our parish and our sphere of ministry - Mine downtown, or those of the core group members whom I hope to disciple and lead to take the gospel with them into the culture around them.



I have said it before in other newsletters: The people we are meeting in Ocean Springs know they are lost...They just don't know there is a Savior. And as God leads us to them, Lord willing, we will have the beautiful, sacred privilege of telling them that they are loved - by One more beautiful than anything they can ask for or imagine. And that He has laid down His life to make them His own. And that, through Him, they can finally know a perfect love, and what it means to be savored for all eternity.

But it all starts with listening. And hearing. And being present with people in their hurts, their fears, and their "Can the good news be true" hopes. It means telling them (Christians and non-Christians alike) of a **gospel that changes everything.** And a church that understands that **evangelism is going.** And it means everything being changed as we realize, in the church and in our ministry, that **the heart of God is that of a Father who runs to prodigals,** and **the heart of Jesus His Son is the heart of a Bridegroom who dies for His beloved bride.**

Friends, will you pray with us toward that end?

- That a new church will be planted as the bride of Christ in the midst of Ocean Springs...
- And believers will come to know the love and security of their Bridegroom's affection...
- And non-believers will come to know the life-saving Truth that Jesus Christ is the One, the only One who loves them perfectly - and who can save them from their sin and brokenness...
- That they too can belong to the family and bride of Christ...
- **So that, when all is said and done, everything we are doing here in Ocean Springs will have one ultimate result: That the Bridegroom will smile in unrestrained joy at the bride that is being brought to Him!**



And finally, will you give to the wedding fund?

Our hope is that what God is doing here on the coast will lead to the salvation of many - in Ocean Springs and far beyond. **Would you consider making a financial investment toward introducing the bride to the Bridegroom?** Whether it is a first time gift or as an ongoing supporter - Your gift will make a difference! Here is how you can give:

- Use the QR code to the right, or visit <http://give.pcamna.org/to/1749>
- Checks can also be sent payable to "Mission to North America"
PO Box 890233
Charlotte, NC, 28289-02333
(Write "Mark Horn, Ocean Springs Church Plant" on the memo line)
- More information for all of this and updates on our Ocean Springs story can be found at our website: www.PlantHopeOS.org!



Thank you for being part of our team. We look forward to the wedding party that is to come with you and with our Savior!

A closing encouragement:

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"To be loved but not known is superficial. To be known but not loved is our nightmare. Only Jesus knows us to the bottom, and loves us to the sky"
- Tim Keller