

The Marriage of MaryJane Boland and Daniel L. Picard
Saturday, October 26, 2019, 2:00 PM

By the Reverend James Ross Smith

Song of Solomon 2:10–13, 8:6–7; Psalm 67; 1 Corinthians 13:1–13; Matthew 5:1–16

Here at Saint Mary's our life is shaped and ordered by a calendar. In a few weeks, the season of Advent will begin, and we will know it. The look and feel of this place will be transformed. The colors of the vestments will change, the flowers will go away, the music will be different, and we'll hear words from the Bible that we know very well. And there is a paradox about all that: the sacred calendar by which we live is about change. Each day, week, and season is different. Sometimes the differences are subtle, sometimes they are dramatic. Advent gives way to Christmas and we are glad of it. We rejoice in the change. But, still, those seasonal changes are predictable and familiar, and that familiarity can be very reassuring. We look forward to our favorite Advent hymns. The figures for the Christmas crèche come out of storage—and there they are! We are glad to see them again. We are familiar with their details, right down to the color of that *one* Wise Man's shoe and the camel's weird smile. And there is comfort in all that. Life inevitably brings change, and so it makes sense to look for stability. It

makes *sense* to reach out and embrace the lovely things that stay the same.

MaryJane is a longtime and very active member of this parish. (Perhaps a bit too active for Daniel's taste.)

MaryJane and I have worked, studied, and worshiped together for many years. I know the many things she does around this place. We've had thousands of conversations over the years about things both mundane and transcendent. She knows me well and I think I know her well, too. I think we work well together. She always finds a way to encourage me to try and get things done and to do them well. And in all this there is a reassuring predictability. I know her, she knows me. We know what to expect. Thank God, *some* things don't change!

And, then, most unexpectedly, along came Daniel. And the advent of Daniel came as a surprise to me, and early on, I confess, I wasn't entirely sure I enjoyed the surprise. I remember one conversation with MaryJane back there in the sacristy during which I said some that went sort of, embarrassingly, like, "Who *is* this Daniel, and what *exactly* are his intentions?"

Now those of you who know either MaryJane or Daniel, or both, know how unnecessary those questions were. But, still, change can be unsettling, and so we resist it. I know I do, though I don't like to admit it.

And then I met Daniel, and I watched him do unexpected things like sit through a lengthy and no doubt, to him, boring acolyte rehearsal. I saw him helping to change a frontal on that altar up there, and I have pictures to prove it. I watched him as he worked to get to know the members of this community—and he did all of these things because he cared about MaryJane. I began to talk to him, and I learned about all the things that he loves, and there are many. He loves his son Alex. He loves his family. He loves his work. He loves the opportunity to heal and teach people and try to transform those organizations where he works for the better. He loves birds, of course. But, most important, he loves MaryJane, and that made all the difference. I realized that resistance to change is often just resistance to grace. When God is in your life—and God is always in your life—then grace is going to happen, whether you like it or not. That is, of course one of Scripture's great themes. In the Bible, God is forever saying get up, go, leave home, wake up,

go forth, I want you to do this, I *need* you to do that, don't count the cost, and, also, by the way, don't be afraid.

And so we have gathered here today to be with MaryJane and Daniel as they take the next step on this unexpected and grace-filled journey; we participate in that journey by promising to support them as they, and we, move into an unknown future.

We have also gathered here today to be with Daniel and MaryJane as they say serious things and make solemn promises to each other in the presence of God. Among other things, they will say that they come here today, bringing with them all that they are and all that they have. They have lived full, rich lives. They know what it is to love. They loved Marshall and Christine, and they love them still, and that is part of who they are and what they have. For them, Saint Paul's words about love are not just sweet, romantic words, easily ignored. They know that love is beautiful. They know that love is, in fact, *everything*, but they also know that love can be hard, and that it means sacrifice. They also know that strange paradox: in making sacrifices for the sake of love, love itself deepens, and then it changes us. As Jesus tells us, "Those who try to

make their life secure, will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it” (Luke 17:33).

The nineteenth-century Jesuit priest and poet, Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote one of his greatest poems about a bird. It’s called “The Windhover,” and the poem is dedicated “to Christ our Lord.” A windhover is a kind of falcon, a kestrel, famed for its ability to float, still, far above the earth, and then, suddenly, to dive earthwards at amazing speeds. Hopkins’ poem is about many things, but it is certainly a poem about grace, about God’s amazing ability to break into our lives with surprising and sometimes unwanted beauty. It begins like this:

I caught this morning morning’s minion, king-
 dom of daylight’s dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn
 Falcon, in his riding
 Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and
 striding
 High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling
 wing
 In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,
 As a skate’s heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend:
 the hurl and gliding
 Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding

Stirred for a bird, —the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!¹

We gather today to bring our hearts out of hiding and to put lamps on lampstands (cf. Matthew 5:1–16) as we give thanks for the gift of love and bear witness to the power of commitment. May the grace of this day bring strength to MaryJane and Daniel all the days of their lives. And may it give us the strength to go forth from this place bearing witness to God, and to our Lord, through whom, to our amazement, we discover this: in love there is no fear, for to cast out fear is love's very gift and its power (1 John 4:18).

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¹ <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44402/the-windhover>.

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