

Fully known

By [Diane Roth](#)

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I went to a wedding the weekend before last, a wedding where I did not officiate. So instead of preaching and coaxing vows out of nervous brides and grooms, instead of praying and being on high alert at all times, I was listening. Intently.

I suppose that I listened intently at least in part because I will confess that, after 20 years officiating at weddings, and after 15 years of marriage, I am not an expert on marriage. I am humbler every year. I don't know if this is a good thing or not.

There were three scripture readings: one was chosen by the bride, one by the groom. The third they chose together. A nice touch, I thought, when the officiant launched into her message, what I chose to call a "substantial sermon" (a compliment, by the way). It was substantial and exhortatory without devolving into one of those sermons that warns young couples about the high rate of divorce.

The bride and groom chose 1 Corinthians 13 as their joint scripture reading. I found myself stuck on a particular phrase that day, and it wasn't the one about love bearing and enduring all things. It wasn't the one about love being patient and kind. It was that phrase about being fully known. I realize that this is part of a large phrase about being a grown up and finally knowing fully, even as I have been 'fully known.'

And it is possible that I heard wrong, but I think that I heard, at one point, about the blessing of being 'fully known' in the context of marriage (not the fact that God knows us fully, something that we can't do one thing about, and is a blessing because, for some reason or another God knows us fully and continues to bear and endure all things with us).

And I wondered what kind of a blessing it is to be 'fully known' in the context of marriage, as far as it is even possible. I know that being fully known for the last 15 years or so has felt like a mixed blessing for me, sometimes. Before I was married, I think I had more illusions about myself. I believed myself to be a nicer person than I do now, for example. Sometime after we are married, we stop showing each other

only our best selves, and someone else knows us, *really* knows us, not just our odd or heartwarming quirks but our secret fears, our besetting sins, our failures. (*"Did you ever consider divorce?" I once asked a woman married over 50 years. "No," she replied. "Murder, but not divorce." And the thing is, I know that she really loved her husband. Fully.*)

It struck me that this can be a vulnerable place to be. When we get married, we put ourselves in someone else's hands. We entrust ourselves to someone else. And we will disappoint each other sometimes.

As for me, even though I loved that substantial wedding sermon, I am not sure I could preach it. Even though everything the pastor said was true, instead of exhortations I see visions. I see a vision before me of an old man who visited his wife every day when she had Alzheimer's. When she would get anxious, and say, "Don't leave me," he would reply, "I am not going anywhere." I know, I didn't know their whole lives together, I didn't know them fully, but I would just get this glimpse, and that would help.

Today, this is the vision I am seeing, though: a couple from my church who celebrated 70 years of marriage the other day. They were at our Saturday night service, sitting in the front like they always do. The small chapel community signed a card for them and gave it to them at the close of the service. (This was not my idea, but the idea of another one of the saints.) They asked if I would give them a blessing, too.

"The first 70 years are the hardest," was the piece of wisdom they had to share as they left.

And then I watched them as they walked out the door to their car. In one hand, they each held a cane that they used to steady themselves. Still, they walked out holding hands.

I don't have any wisdom. Less and less every year, actually. Just the vision of the hands holding the cane, and holding each other. Maybe that's the way to do it, until we are finally and forever fully known.

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