

Haydenville Congregational Church

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June 5, 2011

John 17:1-11

"A Little Lighthouse Stands"

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts
be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord Our Strength and Our Redeemer.
Amen.

More than sixty lighthouses dot the coast of Maine. But six lighthouses in particular are considered the must-see, most special ones. And many people think the #1 must-see, most special Maine lighthouse is the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse outside of Bristol.

The only United States money ever to bear the image of a lighthouse is the state of Maine's official quarter-and the image on the Maine quarter is the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse.

Not only is the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse particularly picturesque, but it sits on top of a huge, dramatic, granite rock out-cropping that juts out into the Atlantic Ocean. This remarkable rock out-cropping rises some 500 feet above sea level and has the striking Pemaquid Lighthouse perched at the top.

But when you are actually standing next to the Pemaquid Lighthouse, one

thing that is striking about the lighthouse is that it is actually quite short. The lighthouse rises only 38 feet above the rock on which it stands...and 38 feet is small for a lighthouse.

The lighthouse itself is short, but it appears tall and majestic perched on top of the rock out-cropping. And because it is bolted to the rock beneath it, that little Pemaquid Point Lighthouse has endured enormous storms, gigantic waves, and torrential downpours since 1835.

A little lighthouse in Maine stands on a sturdy rock out-cropping, jutting into the ocean, and that little lighthouse has survived 176 years of punishing weather there at the edge of the sea.

Let us consider the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse today as we, as a Church family, have honored the married couples among us and witnessed as they renewed their marriage vows.

Let us pause and reflect on the sturdy rock out-cropping that these marriages are built upon the sturdy rock out-cropping that has allowed these marriages to endure the storms of married life together. Let us appreciate the ways these couples, over many years, have bolted themselves to a rock solid foundation that helped their marriage not just endure but thrive in the face of threats to their union, crises in their families, and the shifting winds that couples face during years of married life together.

Many couples preparing to be married spent countless hours, days and weeks focusing on their wedding, and zero hours, days and weeks focusing on their marriage. And then after their blissful honeymoon, they find themselves married with all the joys and challenges married life can hold. There are bills to pay, husbands get sick, wives get tired, money runs low, in-laws are demanding, jobs are stressful, holidays cause fights, children are an issue, cars break down, patience wears thin.

And so slowly over time, it becomes easier to say: I quit.

It is easier to say, "We made a mistake."

It is easier to say, "He's more attractive, I want a divorce."

It is easier to say, "She's younger, I am leaving you."

It is easier to say, "I'd rather live alone."

It is easier to say, "I cannot take it any more."

When the going gets tough, it is easier to leave than to stay. And 50% of all married couples make that choice.

The divorce rate in this country is one out of every two couples.

The couples who survive and not just survive but thrive-enjoy each other, delight in each other, grow together, continue to have fun, continue to find one another interesting, continue to do things together with pleasure, relish being together and hold hands when they walk in the rain-those couples have bolted their marriage to rock solid love, hard core values, unshakeable commitment, and impenetrable loyalty. Those couples are two small people facing the storms of life-disappointments, illnesses, losses, grief, worry, fear-two small people standing hand-in-hand on a bedrock of love and promises kept.

Marriage is not easy, I tell every couple preparing for their wedding.

The wedding is easy, I tell them, but marriage is not.

You are inevitably going to face some difficult days, I tell them. And so you need to plant your feet on the vows you say to each other on your wedding day and bolt yourselves to those pledges.

Essentially, couples who thrive over time have fastened themselves to the sacred promises they made to each other on their wedding day...the way the little Pemaquid Lighthouse is fastened to the granite on which it stands.

Don't come and see me the day you are back from a week's vacation at the beach and tell me how happy you are as a couple, I tell brides and grooms I am going to marry. Come see me the day after you have had a big fight and tell me then how you are working it out. I don't judge the state of a marriage by the days when everything is easy and breezy. I want to hear about how you sustain your loving relationship through the conflicts, disappointments and sorrows you face together.

Bolt yourself to the ways you love and cherish each other. Then, when the squalls whip up at sea, the waves pound on the rocks, and the rain batters the foundation, you will still be standing-together-in the morning.

In today's reading from the Gospel of John we hear Jesus say these words...

'Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all people, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.

3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.

4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do.

5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed.

6 'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word.

7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you;
8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.
9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. 10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. 11 And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one.

Jesus in his tender love is saying: I glorified you O God. I have made you known through my own words and actions. I have spoken of you, channeled you, lifted up your name, and glorified you. They have come to know YOU through me.

Jesus lived as a walking, breathing inbreaking of the kingdom of God. Through him, when people were with him, those in his presence saw glimpses of God's promised Shalom.

I believe that when we are in the presence of a healthy marriage, we experience similar moments. A healthy marriage offers a glimpse of the kingdom, a hint of God's promised Shalom. When we are with a couple who love each other fiercely and profoundly and have chosen fidelity, monogamy and loyalty, when we feel their rock solid commitment to each other through the storms of life, we can experience moments of the inbreaking of the kingdom and we leave their presence enriched and grateful.

'I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world, Jesus said to God who he called Abba, or Daddy. I have made your presence known.

And I believe that loving couples, devoted to one another, whose love and steadfastness shows in their interactions also make God's presence known.

Those couples give us foretaste of the kingdom of God.

Remember ours is an incarnational and relational God.

Ours is not a distant, remote deity.

Ours is a here-and-now divine presence who calls us into relationship with a Spirit and a power that can transform our lives.

And we get to practice relationship building in our daily lives, we are called to practice relationship building in our daily lives, and we are given opportunities with our spouses to experience the close and trusting relationship we are also creating with God.

Our relationships with one another give us the rehearsal time and space to practice our relationship with God. The two relationships are not disconnected, they are not separate. They inform and influence each other.

Marriage gives us many opportunities to be intimate and faithful, patient and generous, kind and sensitive, loving and loyal.

And it is work. And it is hard.

And it is rewarding. And it is worth it.

A friend of mine in Maine told me the Pemaquid Point Lighthouse shines its light 30 miles into the dark night at sea.

That little lighthouse, standing on the solid rock out-cropping, has led many ships safely to shore.

The lighthouse itself is not so big. But perched on all the right stuff-layers of granite, jutting high above the water, jutting out into the

water, rising above the waves-the lighthouse stands as a beacon of hope.

Each married couple is not so big.

But perched on the all the right stuff-layers of love, unshakeable respect, unending admiration, and promises to endure the storms of life together-a healthy marriage stands as an inspiration to many.

The little Pemaquid Lighthouse is not so big, but because of its foundation it sends a strong beam of light miles and miles from shore.

One healthy married couple is not so big, but because of their solid foundation, they send a strong beam of light out into the world.

Mother Theresa once said, "We do no great things. We do small things with great love." In a healthy marriage, the couple recognizes they are just two small people standing before and in a vast world. And so each day, each one does small things with great love.

Jesus glorified God with his actions and his words.

And through him we came to know God.

I believe that when in the presence of a happy, loving couple, we also come to know God. We experience a momentary inbreaking of the kingdom.

I believe that when in the presence of a happy, loving couple, we witness what is possible, we sense the presence of the Spirit, and we are strengthened by the layers of their love.

A little lighthouse stands on the rocky coast of Maine, bolted to a granite foundation, able to withstand the storms at sea.

A loving couple stands on sacred promises made to have and to hold in sickness and in health, in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, as long as they both shall live.

That is a rock solid foundation. Praise God.

Amen.

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