
The Spirit and The Bride Say Come

**A sermon by the Very Reverend Sam Candler
Atlanta, Georgia
The Seventh Sunday of Easter**

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift.

These are the grand words that conclude the Book of Revelation. Yes, that means the entire Bible. The whole library of scripture ends with this flourish, "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!"

It is a beautiful invitation, because it repeats an invitation that appears over and over again in scripture. In the Book of Exodus (24.1, 12), Moses hears the voice of God saying, "Come up to the Lord! Come up to me on the mountain!" Isaiah (55.1) invites the people, "Ho! Everyone who thirsts! Come to the waters!" Jesus says in the Gospel of Matthew 11.28), "Come unto me, all you who are weary and heavy laden." And the final chapter of that bizarre last book of the Bible repeats, "The Spirit and the bride say, "Come. Let everyone who is thirsty come."

After so much smoke and mystery in the Book of Revelation, the final vision set forth to John is a beautiful invitation. It is a wedding. The church life is meant to be a wedding. And more than a wedding, the church life is meant to be a marriage.

It so happens that we are entering the wedding season, or what used to be the wedding season. I have to admit that it bothers me, that so many young persons are delaying their weddings. Hey, it bothers your parents, too!

It used to be (back in my time) that we all got married right after graduation from college. No, wait a minute! A generation before mine, folks were getting married even sooner. They got married instead of going to college. No, wait a minute! A generation before that, folks were getting married before they even reached college age. In generations of long ago, marriage occurred right after puberty. So it is that the past two hundred years have seen a steady rise in the age at which young people decide to marry.

I will let sociologists give us the reasons for that change. Maybe young people do not want to commit to another person until they sense that their own lives are in order, or until they are set out on a steady and responsible course, or until they achieve another sort of maturity.

Some people say that our entire culture is more and more cautious about making any kind of commitment. We do not like to sign on the dotted line. We do not join bowling leagues and social groups, they say. They say that we prefer to do the same things, but just not be committed to them.

But I don't know about that. We are certainly willing to make commitments to organizations which provide us some gratification. For instance, we all seem willing to make two-year commitments to our cellular telephone companies! We subscribe to all sorts of e-mail lists and internet subscriptions!

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." The Christian life is an invitation to commitment. But the Christian life is not just

any commitment. It is a commitment to grace and glory, fullness and maturity.

During his invitation, Isaiah asked his people, "Why do you spend your money on that which does not satisfy?" We might ask the same question today. Messages on our screens and airwaves urge us, over and over again, to spend money on things that do not satisfy. And the worldly among us commit ourselves, unfortunately, to those things which bring us boredom and even misery.

The Christian invitation is a call to fullness, health, and life. It is like the invitation this Cathedral has issued to all of Atlanta at our Cathedral Farmers Market. Come to the Cathedral on Saturday mornings for those things which truly satisfy, those things which are healthy and life-giving: things like local farmers, natural foods, community conversation, and life. The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." We offer the same sustenance on Sundays, too!

Harold Bloom, crusty old fellow, has published a lovely book with the grand and simple title, *Genius*. He devotes that book to a mere one hundred people, people to whom he ascribes that lofty and enviable description, "Genius."

What he tries to say is that genius is worth reading about. Accomplishment and success are worth emulating. He is tired of bad writing, he says, and he's right. The study of mediocrity breeds mediocrity. He makes this analogy: If someone is a furniture-maker, why should he or she study chairs whose arms and legs fall off. No, they study designs that have worked.

The same goes for religion, theology, spirituality. Much of what passes for spiritual writing these days does not work. It is dishonest drivel, and people buy those books hurriedly in the grocery store check-out line, like a last-minute bit of candy.

Much of what we buy, in the interest of spirituality, is really stuff that feeds our illusions of quick gratification. In the marketplace right now, my favorite is the language learning programs. I have seen them in shopping malls and in airports, and their big advertisement is simple. Learn a language now! Learn Arabic in thirty minutes a day. Learn Portuguese!

And I think to myself. Yes, I would like to learn Arabic. Then, I buy the program. But, what happens? I do not learn Arabic. In fact, I bought the wrong thing. All I really bought was a set of CDs or tapes. I did not buy - I could not buy - the thirty minutes a day it takes for me to truly learn. I realize this sheepishly. Then I wait six months, and I repeat the same routine.

Throughout scripture, God is saying, "why do you spend money for what does not satisfy? Ho, everyone who thirsts, let them come to the water. Let them come and buy food that does satisfy."

Good spirituality does not come in a hurry. It is not like a self-help book God does not want a mere spring fling. God does not want an overnight sensation. God does not want a one night stand. God wants a marriage. That is why the church is called a bride, here in the last chapter of the Bible.

One of the great family systems therapists of our time was Edwin Friedman, who died too young in 1996. The last writings of his life have been gathered in a book called *A Failure of Nerve*. In that book, he claims that we are becoming a more immature society. "The immediate threat to the regeneration of American civilization is internal, not external. It is our tendency to adapt to its immaturity." (*A Failure of Nerve*, Edwin Friedman. New York: Seabury Books, page 2). We dumb ourselves down in America.

I agree. The Christian commitment is not a call to mediocrity. It is a call to upward growth and maturity. The call of the Spirit and the bride is a call to the maturity of grace, to the fullness of excellence and hospitality, to the grandeur of salvation itself.

It takes time. It takes commitment, just like any marriage does. But, like all good marriages, the combination of commitment plus grace, over time, is truly glorious. Commitment plus grace, over time, leads to glory.

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let everyone who hears say, "Come." And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift. ,Come Lord, Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all the saints. Amen. (Revelation 22).

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip

© *The Cathedral of St. Philip. All rights reserved.*