

Jane Engle and Ken Burton: What Am I to Do With You

A sermon preached at Seekers Church on June 9, 2002
by Jane Engle and Ken Burton

What Am I to Do With You

Jane:

As most of you know, Ken and I were married here April 27. We want to use today to share with you some of our thoughts that went into the ceremony and even some words from the ceremony. But today, unlike that date, we'd like to frame what we have to say by the lections—specifically, the alternate Hebrew scripture from Hosea 6 and Matthew 9. Mysteriously, these scriptures say what it is we want to say.

Ken:

From Hosea 6:4, "What am I to do with you, Ephraim?"

Jane:

"What am I to do with you, Judah?"

Ken:

"For your love is like morning mist, like the dew that quickly disappears.

And verse 6: "For faithful love is what pleases me, not sacrifice; knowledge of God, not burnt offerings."

Jane:

In the 8th century BC, Hosea was admonishing the people of the Northern Kingdom, the Israelites, for their shallow love, for a love that was strong in the time of need, but one which disappeared in more comfortable, stable or favorable times. He called for a steadfast or faithful love, one that transcended the times.

Ken:

Today, Hosea's words are prophetic for Jane and me as we deepen our understanding of what it means to love one another as wife and husband, as our love for each other

becomes part of our faith journey.

Jane:

Ken and I can look at each other like a financial spreadsheet with assets and liabilities, focusing on each other's assets in times of need, or liabilities in times of comfort. In other words, do I love Ken most when I need him most? Or, Is our love a sacrificial love, one that transcends our own needs and the times?

Ken:

In our wedding ceremony, Jane and I talked about why we decided to get married at this time. It was over a year ago that I convinced Jane that we needed to move our relationship one step forward into marriage; otherwise, it would stall. We had an engagement ceremony where we gave each other the rings we've been wearing ever since. And we had engraved in them the word "regardless".

Jane:

Many people say "forever"...but neither Ken nor I could say that since it had been said before. But what we could commit to was "regardless" ...meaning that we pledged to each other a sacrificial love, one like Jesus displayed to Levi, the despised traitor, or the hemorrhaging woman, one who was dirty and corrupting. We pledged a love that wouldn't disappear like the dew or morning mist.

Ken:

In the remarkable prayer/poem that graces the front of the cover of our bulletin for this season, Elisabeth Dearborn reminds us how 9/11 burned in our hearts to get the fury of love out of the kitchen drawer, to be about loving with a fierceness that we have never before imagined.

Jane:

In the days and weeks following 9/11, I did love with a new fury and fierceness. I met my neighbor who lives two doors down from me; she's lived there the whole time I've lived in my house—10 years—and I'd never met her. I gave colas to the postman and the UPS man and learned about his niece who had had two life threatening operations. In my fears during the anthrax scare, I held tightly to Ken. I loved all I came in contact with. I went out of my way to help others and to make connections.

But as time passed, my love became less fierce; my fears subsided. As my own needs diminished, so to my love for others. I turned back into myself.

Ken:

Our scripture for today, Elisabeth's poem, and the word "regardless" all scream out for us to hold dear what is most important—our connections with each other, to set aside the petty inconveniences and gripes, and to love fiercely.

Jane:

Ken does **happen** to have lots of assets, and I would like to tell you just a few . . .

[Jane mentions some of the things about Ken that she finds attractive.]

Ken:

Then I told Jane why I wanted to marry her.

[Ken mentions some of the things about Jane that he finds attractive.]

Jane:

Then I made a commitment to Ken. [Jane's commitment statement.]

Ken:

And I to Jane. [Ken's commitment statement.]

Jane:

Please join us in the litany that is an insert in your bulletin.

Litany for Jane and Ken

Everyone:

Loving Mother and Father of us all,
strengthen Jane and Ken with patience,
kindness, wisdom, gentleness, and
all the other gifts of your Spirit.

Men:

Keep them faithful to one another and to you.

Women:

Give Jane the gift of a gentle spirit to temper the intensity of her feelings.

Men:

Give Ken the strength and confidence to know and honor the intensity of his feelings.

Everyone:

Heal the wounds from their past so that they do not injure each other.

Women:

Strengthen us, their faith community, that we may support them in their commitment to one another.

Men:

Enable us to know your will and empower us to do it in our homes and work places.

Women:

Enrich all of us with your grace so that we may serve those in need and bring peace and justice to our world.

Ken and Jane:

Amen.