

A letter to parents whose children have decided not to get married in a church. . .

From JP Reynolds

Over my years of ministry I have come to realize certain things which I believe are truths about God and church.

As I share these, I ask that you forgive me if at any time I sound presumptuous or arrogant. That is not my intention.

“I’m spiritual, but not religious” is what many engaged couples tell me. Although they grew up in homes that had some church affiliation, much like yours, they themselves no longer attend weekly church services.

While many of these couples have drifted away from the church rituals of their upbringing, they still believe in God. They desire a ceremony that honors the *sacredness* of what they are doing without it being *religious*, i.e. denominational.

With many of these couples, their parents, like you, still go to church and, like you, often times are disappointed with the couples’ decision not to have a church wedding.

I believe that God is never found in a church building simply because it is a church building. People *bring* God to a church building. Family and friends, knowingly and unknowingly bring God with them to the ceremony. It is their love, joy and wishes that make a ceremony *sacred*—for God can only be found in the love and joy of God’s people.

I believe that when a couple sends out wedding invitations, they are really saying to family and friends “*come celebrate the great good we have found in each other, and bear witness as we give our word to each other.*” It really is that simple. And what could be more sacred?

I believe that a couple enters into the mystery of life and love when they give their word, their vow, to each other. In an age when talk is cheap, what could honor God, who is “The Word,” more than for a person to give his or her word to their beloved with an open heart?

I believe that the sacredness of a ceremony also comes from recognizing that family and friends are the “collective memory” of the day. In years to come, when life gets messy, they are to remind the couple of the love they celebrated and bore witness to. And that is a *sacred* responsibility.

I believe that a wedding ceremony, when done right, renews and refreshes everyone present. When done right, a wedding ceremony reminds us what life is all about. . . friends, family, love, loyalty . . . what could be more *sacred* than creating that simple, yet profound reminder?

I am saddened—and angered—when a couple comes to me and tells me that their mother and/or father have threatened to boycott the wedding because they are not getting married in a church.

I simply do not understand how a parent could inflict such cruelty upon their child, especially when this daughter or son is marrying a good person—a person of integrity.

I can understand something of your pain and disappointment. I cannot, though, understand the harsh words you inflict upon your child.

How often do we say, “God is love”? Can any one of us truly comprehend the magnitude of this belief? I don’t believe any human can—not even the head of a religion. Do you not believe that God’s graciousness encompasses more than we can imagine?

Where there is love, there is God. Every religion holds some understanding of this tenet.

Is not God in the love your child has for their intended?

Is it not possible that God’s love extends far beyond any church service? To believe in God is to believe in an awe-inducing, life affirming mystery. To believe in God is not to believe in magic.

Do you really believe that in the face of love God could be angry?

Why do you claim your anger is a reflection of God’s anger?

Embrace your child, bless your child in and through your hurt, believing all the while, as did all the holy ones of every religion, that in the end. . .

all will be well. . .