

13th May 2023

Promises

**"Oh, why should vows so fondly made,
Be broken ere the morrow?"**

James Hogg, *The Broken Heart*

Some years ago, I conducted the wedding of an American couple. They asked if they could write their own vows. When I agreed to this, they went on to ask if I needed to see them in advance. I said no, that I trusted them, and that it would be OK for me to hear them for the first time on their wedding day. To be honest, I wondered if I would regret being so trusting.

In the marriage ceremony, at the exchange of vows, I asked the groom to make his promise to his bride. He rummaged in his pockets – making a great show of pretending he'd forgotten his notes – then unearthed an old envelope with some scrawly writing on the back. I reckoned he'd scribbled it in the toilet earlier, so I didn't expect much. But to be honest, it was absolutely beautiful – open, tender, inspiring and powerful. Wow! When it was the bride's turn, with a flourish, she turned to her bride's maid and said firmly, "My folder, please!" She was handed an A4 leather document case, from which she took *severa*/sheets of typed notes on fancy paper. And though it was a tad longer than her groom's, it was equally beautiful, appropriate and deeply moving. And for the first – and only – time at a wedding, the exchange of vows was greeted with a round of applause – and well deserved too. Promises at a marriage ceremony – short and scribbled on the back of an envelope, or long and carefully composed on beautiful paper; each one complementing the other, for both were offered with integrity, passion, sincerity and purpose.

We make promises all the time – and not just in the formality of a marriage. Short or long, stumbling or articulate, hastily or carefully prepared, it matters little. For it is the substance of that vow, our promise, that matters, and the integrity and sincerity it conveys. So, if we are to make any kind of promise today or in the near future, let's make sure we mean it and keep it, just as you would wish promises made to you to be offered – and dealt with – in the same fashion.

A prayer for today

*"O Truth unchanged, unchanging. "****

Thank you, God, for the unchanging truth of your promises. Amen

*** William Walsham How, from "O Word of God, Incarnate"*