

A few months ago I asked Mandy, “How did Jeremy propose to you? Did he get down on one knee and pull out a ring? Did he take you to a romantic spot and surprise you with flowers?” She said, “No. I went shopping for the ring with him. And when we got it, I started wearing it, and we were engaged.” Now, I love big, romantic, complicated, tear-jerking engagement stories, but I thought this one had a unique charm to it. It indicated that often in life something is already there, and when you realize it, you act on it. I think this is a natural experience, and it has a supernatural counterpart.

When the Book of Genesis describes the creation of woman, it implies that the man was created with the capability of forming a partnership; it was already there. God provided a partner for the man, who realized it and acted on it, and the two became one. We believe that God still does this. God makes people capable of forming a partnership. It’s hard to explain how two people fall in love – how they find each other (even when they grew up near each other) and yearn for each other so strongly. We think God puts them together, a belief that even the Book of Genesis agrees with. It’s just that we don’t always realize what God has done until later. Once love is there, you look back and say, God was already there. You realize it, and you act on it.

St. Paul was probably addressing a similar situation when he wrote his letter to the Romans. We heard a short piece of it this afternoon. Paul seems to be writing to people who didn’t have much good experience with religion in the past. The temple sacrifices seemed like empty rituals. Instead, they did what seemed fun or happy to them, but not necessarily what would praise God or help other people. Now they had come to realize who Jesus was, and how they should act as a result. Paul says this to these people who had probably given up on religion: Don’t worry if offering a sacrifice of dead animals in the temple is not your thing. “Offer your bodies as a living sacrifice,” he says, “holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship.” Give God yourself. To these people who were thinking only of their own selfish pleasures, Paul demands something more: “Do not conform yourselves to this age,” he says. “Discern what is the will of God.” And lest these people think that the will of God is something that will curb their enjoyment, Saint Paul says when you discern the will of God, you will discover “what is good and pleasing and perfect.” You will want to act on it. Doing God’s will doesn’t just please God – it will bring you pleasure.

So, Mandy and Jeremy, that’s our prayer for you today. That you will offer yourselves to God, discover God’s will, and enjoy the good and pleasing plans that God has for you. You will discover in your love something that was already there: God is already there. When you realize it, you will act on it in ways that please God and give life to you and your new home.