

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a lot of suffering, sacrifice, and fear. It also reinforced our values of community and care. And, if you were Garrett and Bridget, the pandemic opened a window onto the love of your life. They met online at that time, sustained a friendship under difficult circumstances, got engaged during the Chiefs' playoffs (remember those?), and they are very much in person today. New life can come from times of sacrifice. There's always hope for a better day.

That is also one of the themes of Lent, a time of year when we Christians prepare for our annual celebration of the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ. Jesus helped his disciples sort through their priorities and worked wonders for the infirm, including those who could not hear. He suffered an agonizing death, but hope did not die. He rose in glory to new life.

During Lent we accept penances to appreciate our blessings and realign our priorities for the benefit of others. We endure these temporary sacrifices that lead to new life.

Garrett and Bridget are well aware that their wedding falls during Lent this year. You may not know, but your anniversary will also fall during Lent every year. The earliest possible date for Easter is March 22, so your anniversary will always have this built-in quality of hope: sacrifice that leads to new life. It's actually a mature way to think about marriage.

St. Paul makes this point in his First Letter to the Corinthians. Love appeals to us because of the good feelings we get from it—joy, exhilaration, happiness, and fun. But Paul offers this reminder: “Love is patient, love is kind. It is not... rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood.” On the wedding day, that list of requirements feels easy, but on subsequent anniversaries, many couples admit they've fallen short on patience, kindness, seeking the other's interests, and being slow-tempered. They remember their naive expectation of unending bliss, but they've also learned that true love means sacrifice, and it produces something more, a mature and even more enjoyable life.

Bridget and Garrett have learned the value of self-denial in many ways. They attended the same university, but different departments, yet with similarly good results. Garrett worked hard in school for a degree in agriculture business and now can do project management. Bridget has been studying audiology and helps people overcome hearing disabilities. They put into play in their own lives some of the activities Jesus pursued in his: helping people set priorities, healing the woes of those who cannot hear. In addition to sharing their love for each other, Garrett and Bridget serve the broader community in many ways. As people need help from areas as diverse as pandemics and planning, Bridget and Garrett have positioned themselves to make a contribution to the world.

My brothers and sisters, wherever our loves originated, they have a common path toward a common destiny. The path is sacrifice that propels joy and provides unflinching hope for new life.