

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Wedding of Tapiwa and Noluvuyo
18 December 2010

Genesis 2
1 Corinthians 13:1-7

Dear Friends in Christ, dear family members and most importantly, dear Nono and Tapiwa, thank you for inviting me and all of us to share with you on this special day. What a joy it is indeed to be here.

As your name (Nono - Noluvuyo) suggests, we are here to *ukuvuya nani*, that is, to share in this special joy as both of you tie the knot.

There are many wonderful stories bubbling in my head as I recall Nono's childhood. In my mind, all of them are coloured by her contagious laughter. For Nono could laugh until everyone in the room caught her infectious laughter bug.

Let me just retell one story that comes to mind - though I promised both Nono and Tapiwa, when we met recently, in London, at Heathrow, to work out the details of the service, that I would not let out some of the stories!

But one that comes to mind is from 1990, when the family used to live in Spruitview. I went visiting with a colleague from St Mary's Cathedral.

Now, Nono liked the leather couches they had at her home because each time somebody sat on them, they would make this funny noise. Quite what that noise was, I leave to your imagination.

Anyway, my colleague simply threw himself down on one of these couches and it duly made 'that noise'.

Nono just burst out laughing. We did not know what Nono was laughing at, but she laughed so much that we all joined in.

Finally, just before we left, we asked her what was so funny, and she said 'Didn't you hear the sound that the uncle made when he sat on the couch?'

There are many other wonderful stories that I could tell about Nono.

All of them bring joy and excitement in my heart - including the fact that I cannot believe that Nono, who was a flower girl at Lungi and my wedding, is now getting married today.

So, Nono and Tapiwa, we are so happy, so full of joy, that as a family we are at this ceremony. May your contagious laughter continue to touch many, and may it overflow in your marriage.

Returning to Scripture, the Gospel of Saint John reminds us that the true vocation of all Christians – and, today, specifically of you, Nono and Tapiwa – is to abide or to remain in Jesus; and within this vocation, this calling, our responsibility to one another is love.

This love is not superficial, but rather the love whose standard is based on Jesus' sacrificial death.

Verse 13 of our gospel reading told us this: 'No one has a greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.'

Nono and Tapiwa, fortunately you are Christians, and therefore this is the standard that you both are called to base your love on.

In the second lesson that was read this morning, St Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, Chapter 13, verses 1 to 7, also describes the qualities of this love.

This passage is untypical of Paul and his general message to the Corinthians. He is so overcome by the image of love, that he deviates from his normal style of writing and becomes a poet (imbongi), overflowing with such artful praise.

He zooms in, focussing on this one virtue as being above other spiritual gifts that he earlier referred to in his letters.

These spiritual gifts – most of us know them as the fruit of the Spirit – are love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

In this uncharacteristic praise-filled passage to the Corinthians, St Paul zooms in on three virtues: faith, hope and love. And, he says, the greatest of these is love.

To use language that Nono and Tapiwa may understand better, it is as if St Paul says the other spiritual gifts are a 'trial balance' or journal entries.

If you were to summarize all these line items into a balance sheet, they lead into three, key, principles in terms of income, expenditure and output.

And the bottom line is not money, but the bottom line is love.

If you abide in this love with which Christ first loved you, then you will be able to love.

We are created in love, as the Genesis account tells us. And this is why we are able to love.

Let us go slightly deeper in today's lessons.

In the creation story, in both the first and second chapters of the book of Genesis, humanity is affirmed as precious in the eyes of God.

Humanity in partnership is regarded as sharing the spark of the divine – male and female together are made in the image of God.

Therefore all of us are called to honour and respect each other and to accord each other a dignity that is akin to God – and especially in the bond of marriage.

Tapiwa and Nono, listen again to these loving words that affirm what I am talking about in the creation story: 'Bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh'.

These are loving words which says to both of you, you are not to attempt to dominate or subdue each other.

You are to ensure that you both flourish, in body, mind, heart and soul. In other words, you should both flourish physically, intellectually, emotionally and spiritually.

This should be so, as you were created out of love by God. You need to treat each other as precious in the eyes of the creator God.

The second point that I want to draw from today's lessons, and from the introduction to the Marriage Service that I read from the Anglican Prayer Book (and which is itself based in the Genesis story), is what I call the dignity of difference.

In addressing another public issue on the 10th December 2010 I said
'The bond between man and women, most fully expressed in the sacrament of marriage, should always be one of the deepest trust, mutual respect and unconditional partnership and love through all the trials of life. As Christians we believe that, of all human relationships, it is marriage that most fully reflects the limit less love and covenant commitment that God has for his people and his world.'

This is ideal which you both must always uphold and strive to achieve.

Nono and Tapiwa, within this partnership of mutuality and reciprocity, respect the dignity of your differences too.

Tapiwa, do not knock Nono into conformity; nor should Nono knock you into what she thinks you ought to be.

Respect each other's individual strength and differences.

This dignity of difference will be shown later in this service in relation to your denominational distinctions, when only the bride and the groom will receive Holy Communion.

Understanding and celebrating difference is a challenge in our globalizing world.

This brings me to the third point that I want to talk about. Nono and Tapiwa, you will not live in vacuum – you will be living in this real world.

Uphold the integrity of this world, and the environment in which you will be placed.

Remember that, in the Genesis account, it is not only human beings that are part of God's creation. The heavens and the earth and all living creatures are also the work of his hands.

So in your attitudes and actions, do not treat God's world as if it is one of infinite, unending, resources.

Make this world a better place, for you have borrowed it from your children.

As you abide in God, abide in his love and love each other, spare a thought for this finite world – a world which you hold in trust for your children ('I hope there won't be too many!') and your children's children.

As I sum up, Nono and Tapiwa, my prayer for you today and always is that you may know the love of God, which surpasses all understanding.

May you may know its depth, its breath and its length.

I pray that you may be a blessing to each other, and to all of God's creation; and that you may keep growing in fully coming to know Christ and his love, even as you see him only partially or dimly or in part.

As for those of us who are here – wishing Nono and Tapiwa well and celebrating with them at this wedding – my prayer for us as well as them, is this:

- May each of you, in your individual walk of life, feel the creative love of God;
- May you know the qualities of love that St Paul spoke about;
- May you encounter and feel the sacrificial love of Christ our Lord;
- May this knowledge speak and transform our individualism, our materialism and our consumerism;
- May we all recognize one another as special, and reflecting the spark of the divine which we each carry;
- May we show this in our daily activities, in love, in sex, in work or in whatever comes our way, and is our vocation in God's world.
- May we celebrate our differences and respect creation.

Remember – there are three virtues that last forever: faith, hope and love.

But the greatest of these is love – and the greatest thing we can do is to live in love with one another, loving our neighbours as ourselves.

Congratulations.