

## The Renewal of Marriage Vows

**PREACHER : Canon Jean Kerr, Canon Missioner**

**Rochester Cathedral**

3.15pm : Saturday, September 30 2006

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OPENING PRAYER – Father God, we thank you that you have loved us with an everlasting love. Enable us now to receive that love again through your word and by your spirit. Amen

Well it's all here in the Album. You'll no doubt have something similar, perhaps in sepia tones because it was trendy or because it's old, or in black and white or in glorious colour. It's all here capturing the moment, the great day. Holding in its images all those hopes and dreams, aspirations and expectations, the perfect couple, the love match made in Heaven. And we kept it – the album safe, gathering dust, we kept it ... because we kept it. As if somehow in the keeping of it we would keep something precious of ourselves

Then there were the presents. Not for many of us the grand list kept in posh West End stores where gilt edged invitations announce that Gavin and Shaz invite you to choose something from their list - making a huge assumption that we actually want to buy something from it and indeed have the money to do so. Presents being the measure of affection. For many it was simply what little the money could buy or even coupons allow. For us it was 12 pairs of white cotton sheets - that no one could iron. I've still got one here. There's a tear in the corner, the colour no longer pristine white, the middle going threadbare now after 36 years, but it too carries a story. Restless nights when parents were dying, the time the anxious child crawled in between us and was promptly sick, the long lie-ins – well at least until 8am! That cold space left when one was working away and those chocolaty finger prints – I 'm sure I can still smell them, of Christmas family time when presents were opened all too quickly and yes then a covering for a newly wed daughter. It's symbolic of all the stretches and stresses of married life. For those times when our humanity caused pain, the threadbare section when sheer hard words and grit were called for - but the sheet has stood the test of time - we've all of us stood the test of true love and time .

For what was written in those gifts that were given us. What was lurking in those photos taken, was a belief that this was real love, passionat, human but committed in covenant - love that we call marriage .

Ok so we've moved on. Look he is not quite the Errol Flynn film star that we once saw and sure we're not quite the fashion glorious model that glided down the aisle, but we have proved, and we can give thanks, that whatever life has thrown and will throw at us – many waters cannot quench love .

The reading from the *Song of Solomon* gives us a dynamic picture of this love – strong as death with a passion that is unyielding, a love that burns as a roaring fire. Many waters, raging oceanic waters cannot quench such love.

But some days we know the reality of that love in another way. More like a barely flickering ember- when times were hard, money in short supply, when family were less than loving. When energy and trust were low and irritation high, when illness hovered at the door - but yes even then many waters couldn't quench that love. Even death or desertion cannot do that.

This was brought home to us when we went out to Indonesia the day after the oceanic roar called the Tsunami. Families were devastated, loved ones snatched away and yet we saw there time and again that even this water could not quench love for each other, nor could it stop people loving God!

What we have before us is a gift from God. His gift of marriage for you to use, to cherish and to pass on its truth. It is precious and even if for some of you death separates it now, it is still precious and its truth is to be passed on .

But also your marriages have been a gift to the society we live in. Each marriage has helped create stability, setting foundational kingdom values, they have reflected to the world something of the relationship that Christ has with his bride the Church. Yes, we know that gift is rejected by many, even in your own families, but it is also desired by many who long to be encouraged to take its journey.

So I thank you; thank you for the precious gift of marriage that you've held on to, rejoiced in, and even at times I am sure despaired with – thank you. Thank you for your journey has also seen Jesus walking with you.

Steve Irwin – known as the Croc man – his widow Terri said this after his recent death by accident. “I am blessed. If I could I would do it all again, I would not change a thing, even knowing, as I do, the outcome, it would not change a thing. I am blessed.”

So what picture does the spiritual camera show today for you? I don't know but I do know that the face of the celestial camera man is smiling on you and saying “Well done, I love you”

And what gifts would you ask for from God this day to continue on the next step of this journey? Again I do not know but I do know that he will continue in his faithfulness to you just as he has done throughout your life . To His name be praise this day and for ever more. Amen