

The Vintage Voice

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A Wedding to Remember

The Rev. David K. Fly

My final Sunday as Rector of Grace Church, Kirkwood, Missouri, was on Pentecost 1998. Everything was prepared, a party was planned, and my sermon was written. There was nothing to do but try to relax and await the big day. However, I got a surprise I was not quite ready for. On the Friday before Pentecost, my Associate called. He was quite ill but was scheduled to do the wedding of a couple of our parishioners the next day at a chapel in a small park a few miles outside St. Louis. Would I, he asked, be willing to do the service for him? I knew that he had done all the preparation, and I knew the couple, so I had no problem agreeing. After all, I had done a few weddings in my day, and this one would be a snap. "Of course, I'll do it," I said.

He told me a bit about the plans for the wedding, although I must admit I was only half listening as he began to explain the unusual nature of this particular wedding. So I cut him short with "Don't worry about a thing. I've got it covered." As a college chaplain in the '60s and throughout the '70s, I had already seen some pretty unusual things at weddings, so they would have to do something *really* special to get my attention. For another thing, I was preparing to retire as Rector of Grace Church after seventeen years and from the active ministry after thirty-three years. Despite the fact that my sermon was ready, the service planned, and the reception after it was in good hands, I was a wreck! The happy certainty of being the Rector of Grace Church or Rector of Anyplace would soon be behind me. Not only did I not know for sure *what* I would be next, I wasn't even sure *who* I would be next. I explain all this to support the fact that I wasn't really listening when my Associate explained what would be waiting for me at the little chapel the next day. "No problem," I thought, "I'll just pop out there on Saturday afternoon, do the wedding, and get back to my anxiety over saying just the right thing on my last trip to the pulpit."

When I arrived on Saturday afternoon, I immediately knew that I was about to have a very different experience. After I left the parking lot, I found myself suddenly in the midst of an elaborate Civil War reenactment. I walked through rows of tents of Confederates. It was a hot day, but there were dozens of large, burly men dressed in grey flannel military costumes sitting around campfires that were blazing in the early summer heat. There were a few women as well, done up in long gingham dresses and bonnets. When I arrived at the chapel, I located the bride and groom, who were also done up in period costumes. And instead of using the names I knew

them by, they introduced themselves to me as Colonel Beauregard and Miss Sally — their reenactor names. Quickly recovering my composure, but also trying to remember my responsibilities in the real, rather than the reenacted world, I explained that if I was to do the wedding, I would have to use their real names. They seemed to be disappointed but reluctantly agreed. Then they left me alone in the chapel as they went off to prepare for the wedding.

When it came time for the service, I heard the roll of drums and a fife. I went to the door of the chapel and saw that the couple was being escorted by rebel troops. Down the dusty path they came with snare drum and fife leading the way. The troops marched into the chapel and took their seats. I was a little worried because there were lots of guns, and I had neglected to suggest they check them at the door. I went ahead with the wedding. As in many such services, there were tears. Although, in this case, the tears may have been caused by the sweat dripping into people's eyes.

Finally, the wedding was over and the happy couple processed out of the chapel. The soldiers stood outside the door with crossed swords, creating an archway for the couple to walk under. The congregation gathered in the churchyard to throw rice.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, there were gunshots. I ran to the door of the chapel to find Colonel Beauregard lying on the ground and the grieving Miss Sally bending over him. It seems that a nasty group of Yankees had used this opportunity to catch the Confederates off guard — and attacked! Some of the guests circled around the dying Colonel and Miss Sally while others raced off after the Yankees, guns ablaze and a blood-curdling rebel yell. “YEE-HAW!”

At this point, I stepped forward and, trying to get into the spirit of the moment said, “Should we do last rites?” Lying flat on his back in the hot sun, Colonel Beauregard opened one eye and said, “It's only a reenactment!”

And that was my last wedding as Rector of Grace Church. The next morning I preached my last sermon to the congregation with the sounds of fife and snare drums and rebel yells still ringing in my ears.



The Rev. David K. Fly retired in 1998 from Grace Church, Kirkwood, Missouri, after thirty-three years in ministry. He and his wife Adrienne have led Planning for Tomorrow and Enriching Your Retirement conferences for the Church Pension Fund since 2000. They live in St. Louis, Missouri. David's memoir, *Faces of Faith — Reflections in a Rearview Mirror*, was published by Church Publishing Incorporated in 2004.