

And yes I said yes I will yes

By [Laura Kelly Fanucci](#)

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Ten years ago we started being married. It is the vow that started our vocation.

But what does it mean when a vow becomes an everyday verb? When a calling is shared as a single story?

When we think about a wedding, we often think about a beginning. A clean slate for a new couple. An untraveled road stretching out before them. But there were endings that day, too. The end of family units as they once were, now learning to embrace another member. The end of two single lives, now braided together to become a new creation.

We have chosen this person, and not another. We are making this decision, and not another. All of these beginnings and endings will change us. Forever. This is what callings do.

Recently I read [When Breath Becomes Air](#) by Paul Kalanithi. To be honest, I read it in two days. I could not put it down.

It is the story of a neurosurgeon diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer when he was 36 years old. It is the memoir of a masterful writer. It is a poetic and philosophic reflection on death from a man on both sides: patient and doctor.

It is the best book I have read in years.

After I finished the book, I read [a New York Times essay by Paul's wife, Lucy Kalanithi](#), a doctor and gifted writer like her late husband. She is now a widow in her thirties, raising a young daughter. Her words on marriage caught my breath and held it.

One night recently, alone in bed, I read "A Grief Observed" by C.S. Lewis, and I came across the observation that "bereavement is not the truncation of married love but one of its regular phases." He writes that "what we

want is to live our marriage well and faithfully through that phase, too.”
Yes, I breathed. Bereavement *is* more than learning to separate from a spouse. Though I can no longer comfort Paul, the other vows I made on our wedding day—to love Paul, to honor and keep him—stretch well beyond death.

Did I think about death on my wedding day? Did I consider the statistical probability that I would be the one to outlive my husband? To face bereavement as a natural phase of marriage? To live out my wedding vows beyond death?

I did not. I only thought about what was beginning. Which felt like everything.

I have thought a lot about beginnings and endings this year. [Births and deaths.](#)
Hopes and losses.

I have wondered what it means when one chapter ends and another begins. Especially when there is only one other person (besides the Divine that keeps companioning) who has lived the whole story alongside you.

What does it mean to share one story together—all of it, the tragic and the joyful, the extraordinary and the everyday?

This is what a marriage is, at its best. It is our co-authored story. As any co-authors can tell you, it is a work composed of compromises. Heaps of effort behind the scenes that never see the light of day. Frustrations in the margins of what was included and what was not. Conversations round and round the same subject till finally there is consensus or conversion (or a stubborn truce to simply move ahead). And forgiveness—so much forgiveness, every day forgiveness—for the innate, gnarled humanness of each person trying to make something better for the other and the whole they share.

It is a duet that soars in parts and falters in others. But even through disappointment, it hopes to produce a better work than we could create on our own.

And this—the ordinary, everyday work and love of choosing another, choosing them each morning, choosing them in the darkness as well as the light, choosing to build a life around them (which by extension means you cannot build a life around only yourself—imagine! the audacity!)—**this is the wonder of what marriage can be.**

But we fumble when we try to convey the vastness of this vocation in words. I trip on this truth every time I try to sign a card, write a toast, or wish a couple well in their receiving line.

We say little about love today because it feels too vast to capture, too slippery to pin down in words. We write little about marriage because it seems too sentimentalized to celebrate, too politicized to theologize.

I think about the Christian calling to marriage, the vocation that my church celebrates as a sacrament, and I feel as if I have only scratched the surface of what it means to claim that God has called me to this love and work.

My brother is about to marry a wonderful woman in two weeks, a true partner for his life. When I wonder about what I want to wish them on that day, I find myself catching my breath and holding it.

Because they are saying yes to everything. To all of life: its beginnings and endings and all the ordinary in between.

They have no idea where their shared story will take them. Neither do any of us who will raise a happy glass to them that night. But we are all saying yes to the hope of their lives.

... and yes I said yes I will Yes.

This is Joyce's brilliant turn with Molly Bloom's final words in *Ulysses*, isn't it? That the most powerful words weave together endings and beginnings. That the Yes that we give another is our best imitation and exultation of the One who first said Yes to us, breathing life into our bones.

For ten years I have told one man each day that I loved him. For ten years I have chosen him and no other, this life and no other. For ten years we have written this story together: beginnings and endings and every curve in between.

But what I knew ten years ago and what I know today is this: Yes is the best way I can spend my life, give my life, make a life. It is my only Yes, my always Yes, my ever Yes.

We are still being married, every day. And this story is still becoming ours.

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