### “His First Sign” Steve Finlan for The First Church, Jan. 16, 2022

**1 Corinthians 12:4–11**

4Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 6and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

**John 2:1–11**

1On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” 4And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” 5His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” 6Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. 8He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. 9When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” 11Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

We have two very different Scriptures today. We have one of Paul’s instructions to the church at Corinth, and then the tale of Jesus’ first miracle. This first miracle is strange in several ways. It seems to almost be an accident. Jesus resists Mary’s suggestion that he do something about the running out of the wine, but she seems to be confident that he will do something, since she tells the servants to follow whatever instructions he gives. Seemingly, he begins to feel sorry for the celebrants and decides to supply what is needed for them to keep drinking. Already you can imagine him getting in trouble with the moralistic types of people, not at the wedding but in educated society, the ones who are religiously proper and morally strict. Really, Jesus never had a chance with that kind of person. He was never going to suppress his personality enough to satisfy them.

We have some records of the grumbling against him, as when the Pharisees asked “Why does your teacher eat with tax-collectors and sinners?” (Matt 9:11). “Sinners” was a term the Pharisees used for Jews who were not Pharisees. Jesus was not afraid to talk to anyone. And some of the people he spoke to were considered disreputable by others. Jesus did not try to cultivate alliances with the moralistic and religious public figures. He did not seek public praise and prestige. He sought meaningful conversation. He sought to understand people and to help them, sometimes to empower them.

The story shows Jesus at home in a small village wedding ceremony. He is comfortable with people celebrating and drinking. Cana is only about four miles north of Nazareth, so he would probably have already known just about everybody at the wedding. Jesus appreciates the ordinary pleasures of life. He does not look down on someone for drinking wine at a wedding.

This miracle differs from most of Jesus’ others in another way. All of his healings changed people’s lives, not just physically but socially, as they would be more accepted by society after their healing than before. But providing wine did not change anybody’s life. It just allowed a joyous atmosphere to be maintained, showing Jesus’ interest in common people and their lives. And his wine was the best, the steward says.

The story also shows Mary having an unusual degree of quiet confidence that her son could do something about the wine situation. Talk about a mother who believes in her son! “You need help on anything? Talk to my son.” And as for each one of us having a gift, Jesus had *several*, didn’t he?

But Paul’s passage is about the gifts given to ordinary believers. Among the gifts Paul lists is “the discernment of spirits” (1 Cor 12:10). This is intriguing. It would be great to be able to always discern the spirit or the true attitude of someone who is speaking to you, to be able to smell out ulterior motives, or manipulative intentions, or attitudes of rebellion toward God. What a great and useful skill. Also useful would be “the utterance of wisdom” and “the utterance of knowledge” (v. 8). I am guessing these are spiritual wisdom and spiritual knowledge, things that have to do with goodness and truth, love and unity, beauty and peace. All these gifts “are activated by one and the same Spirit” (v. 11), Paul says. These build upon prophetic values, and take them further. The prophet Zechariah says “Speak the truth to one another, render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace” (Zech 8:16). Justice and truthfulness make for a peaceful city. Truth and peace make for justice. All of these certainly go with the fruits of the Spirit of which Paul writes. Paul says all these gifts are “for the common good” (1 Cor 12:7).

What gifts do you have? What gifts would Jesus see in you? What undeveloped gifts do you think Jesus would like to encourage and build up in you, that could serve the common good?

Even Jesus providing wine was for the common good, or the common *enjoyment*, in this case. The common good includes those traditional pleasures of marriage, graduation, award ceremonies, holidays, and other joyous gatherings with family and friends. These are not *all* that matter, though. There is the commitment to the endless service of God and God’s values. There is dedication to God’s will, a dedication that requires eternity to meet its fulfillment. These are the most important things.

But I think it’s also important that we not be frightened, or overwhelmed, or intimidated by God or by the prospect of eternal life. This Jesus story helps to reduce our fear of God. It lets us know that God allows us to appreciate the ordinary joys of life. Living the godly life is not alien to the enjoyment of normal pleasures. God values conversation among friends. And God does not favor the wealthy, the powerful, the educated, or the ordained. We are all equal in his eyes, and we have equal spiritual opportunity.

The lesson today is not just about ordinary joys, it is about getting over the idea that religion is hyper-serious or intimidating or foreign to human nature. Seek God in the ways of your life and in the yearnings of your heart, not because all your ways are right or all your yearnings are divine, but because there is *something* of God in your life and in your yearnings and in your loves. God is interested in your life. We could say that our interests and our gifts are all given by the Spirit for the common good. Your assignment is to see if you can connect your life more closely to God, if you can shine God’s light upon all your interests and enjoyments, and raise your consciousness so that everything is ultimately directed to doing God’s will.

Dedicate your gifts to God and receive the love that comes to you, and *through* you, from God.