

Sermon Epiphany 2 2020
January 19, 2020
John 2:1-11

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning we meditate on the Gospel Lesson previously read, Jesus changing water into wine.

I was preparing this week and beginning to think about how to preach this lesson, the changing of water into wine, and as is often the case, I wasn't sure where to go. After all, this is another one of those lessons we tend to be pretty familiar with. I was thinking about how I'd been discussing recently this shift from the Old to the New Testament. And that's something that certainly fits. This is Jesus taking the water of the Old Covenant, the covenant in the Temple, the covenant God made with Moses, and He's now filling it with the sweet wine which is the cleansing in His blood. That's good. For homework meditate on that.

But then I was hit with something else as I read this lesson from Amos. Now, to give you some background about Amos, he was a prophet during the reign of Uzziah in the Southern kingdom, in Judah, and of Jeroboam II in the North, in Israel. So this is about 750 B.C. or sometime before that. Apparently during this time, there was a lot of prosperity. From what I read, there was political stability in both kingdoms, and as is often the case with stability, the ability to produce a fair amount of wealth. Sound familiar?

It's in that context then, that you have Amos' preaching. If you read the book of Amos, it's a lot of Law, as we Lutherans like to call it. It's a lot of preaching that is God's warning to the people that they've gone off course. Apparently, in the midst of their wealth and their prosperity, they were leaving behind the poor. They were overlooking them, they were not caring for them, etc. And if you read the Bible much at all, or listen much to Jesus' preaching, you know that's not OK in God's eyes. You better take care of the poor. In view of that, then the Lord, through Amos, tells the Jews that He's going to hold them accountable for that. There's going to be a lot of judgment brought upon them. If you read Amos, there's a fair amount of fire and brimstone there. Fire and brimstone that we should ourselves always hear to help restrain our sinful selfishness. But that's not where I want to go with this.

What was so interesting to me was what we have in Chapter Nine of Amos: restoration. There is this judgment that God brings upon these people, but then you have all of this beautiful language of mercy, of abundance, of restoration and peace: **“the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit.”** Of course as you hear those words you can see the connection: there will be wine and Jesus shows the wine. He doesn't just show it, He makes the wine! And it's there that we can make a connection to ourselves.

Now, don't worry, I'm not going to stand up here and preach like Amos. I don't have a clear word from the Lord like that, but I can tell you we can see judgment all around us. I don't mean necessarily for our lack of generosity—although as Christians we should always seek to be more generous, generous in our finances, in our love, in our mercy, and forgiveness. But what I mean is that we can see the ways that God brings judgment to the rebellion of our sinfulness.

Now I do want to take a second to make a point about judgment. When we understand God's judgment as Christians, we have to understand that the wrath of God has been poured out on Christ. Jesus' blood has been shed that we would be forgiven, that we would not bear the anger or wrath of God any more. It's all been done and paid for by Him.

This means it not as though God is up there looking down us to mess up and for ways that He can say, "Gotcha!" He's not waiting for you to commit that certain sin so He can catch you. He's not waiting for you to have that one though that He can punish. He's not trying to trap you. He tests us, but not to trap us and say, "Look, you failed!!" No, He's instead stripping away our idols, our false gods, and the things we trust in instead of Him, and He's pulling those out of our hands to teach us how to hold on to Him alone.

But what we can see in the world is a general experience of the fallenness we know in sin. And it's in the words of the Gospel lesson that I think we can best understand this. You see when Mary approaches Jesus, she comes to Him because the wine ran out. As John says, "**When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.'**" Now this word for "ran out" is the same word that the prodigal experiences when his food and money are lacking. If you remember that, the prodigal takes all of the money from his dad, takes his inheritance, and he goes and parties it up until it has run out, until it's lacking—really until the prodigal himself is lacking. That's the wine here in the story, it's lacking.

That's how we experience judgment. Before the Fall, nothing was lacking. There was plenty of food, plenty to drink, there was plenty of warmth. And there was plenty of love. There was no lacking of love between Adam and Eve, between them and God. You could even say there was plenty of God. But now we know something else, don't we? We know lacking, don't we? Of course there's a lot of goodness that we experience, thanks be to God, but there's also always some lacking.

We try and we try to be good, we come and we hear how God loves us, how He forgives us. As I've heard it put, we come to His Word, to this rail for His body and blood and He fills our bag. But then we empty it. It doesn't keep making it. Our patience with that particular person, they say this or that and we try to love them, but it runs out. It begins to be lacking. Our love for this particular person, we let it run short, ignoring their needs for our own. Or Life. Life ultimately is going to run out. It's lacking. None of us gets the fullness of life we'd like. I don't mean in terms of contentment with material things and provisions, God provides for us abundantly, but with life itself. Sure we can be ready to go be with Jesus, but that's because we know something better is in store, that this is lacking.

In fact, I often say there's something in us that tells us this isn't how it's supposed to be, we know there's something better. The Lord has placed it into our hearts to know there's more, that's why even atheists constantly strive for something better, for improvement, for utopia.

In connecting to the lesson, this lacking can even feel like what the master of the feast says to Jesus: "**Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.**" You've guarded the good stuff. It can feel like that can't it? Especially when that lacking is most apparent, most felt, it can seem like the good stuff is ever out of reach, never to be had. It can feel like you're always stuck eating Twinkies, when the gourmet chocolate cake seems like it should be coming.

But you see this miracle shows us that in Jesus it's come. The relief from the lacking is really here. There's wine now. There's the wine of the forgiveness of sins. There's the One who steps under judgment and promises something more. There's the One who takes every piece of the brokenness of this world, every ounce of the pain of what has run out, and He's pulled them all into Himself. And He brings the new life, the resurrection which is the promise that this will all be better.

I don't know if you notice the first words of the passage here, but John points to it. He says, "**On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee.**" On the third day, there was the feast. On the third day, there was the hope, on the third day, what was lacking was made full. On the third day the glory of God was revealed: "**This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory.**" The glory of the death overcome on Good Friday, the glory of the judgment of the people poured out and forgiven, the glory of the new life in the most delectable of feasts.

Of course, you can't ignore the connection. And as I say that, you might be thinking, "what connection?" When you look to the end in the Bible, figuratively in terms of what it says about the end of time for this creation, and literally at the end of the book, at the end of Revelation, there's a picture. It's a picture of a feast. There's this new creation that comes down. There's the new heaven and the new earth. And all of the old stuff is gone, behold, Jesus there makes all things new. And what happens? A wedding party, a feast. A marriage feast between this Savior Jesus and His bride. The marriage feast celebrating the union between this Lord and His Church, His bride whom He has washed in water with the Word, the bride whom He has cleansed in His blood. This feast of Jesus and you.

And Christians, what you lack now won't be lacking there. Your joy, your fulfillment, your holiness, your love. All of that will be overflowing. It will be bubbling over like fine champagne. And Jesus shows you that in this lesson. It will be overflowing in Him.

Of course, that's the promise to come. You still have to wait for it, which is hard, isn't it? It's hard while we still sit here waiting, still wanting something better, still experiencing that lacking. And He is so generous, He gives it to you. He gives you more. He says, "here, know that this is coming." Last week, we saw that in His baptism which showed the promises that are yours in baptism, that He is with you, with you in all things, every trial and tribulation. And here we can connect to the foretaste of the feast to come in His Supper. You see you get a picture of the feast of His Kingdom when you come and dine at His table, at His rail. You get the preview of heaven, you get heaven here in your midst even as He comes to you again, and again and again. Christian, what a blessing that is yours in Him. He is with you, His giving you all that you lack and more. It might not always feel like it, it might not always seem like it, but that's the reality in Him. He is the One who brings fullness in all things. He brings comfort, fulfillment, forgiveness, and most of all love and mercy. Amen.