

Sermon Second Sunday after Epiphany 2019

January 20, 2019

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 upon the Gospel Lesson of Jesus turning water into wine.

Of all of Jesus' miracles, this might be the most surprising—especially for the His first miracle. Do you think He was just doing this as a practice run before He got ramped up for the real miracles? Do you think this was just a fluke? Did He just do this to appease Mary, so we should be encouraged to pray to her? The answer to all of those questions is no. Without equivocation, no. Jesus didn't need practice. He didn't just accidentally do miracles; and Jesus certainly wouldn't do something just to appease someone, even she were His mother. And He certainly wouldn't do it so that we would be encouraged away from Him in our prayers. No look at what John tells us, **“This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”** John tells us clearly, Jesus did this for the same reason He did the other miracles, for the same reason John wrote His book: that people would believe in Him. So why water into wine?

Well there are a lot of reasons we could draw from this. There's the wedding. There's the miracle taking place within the vessels used for washings under the Old Covenant. There's revelation that this isn't yet His hour. There is so much here, and we'll touch on many pieces of this, but first I want to talk about the weddings at that time and hospitality in general then. You see hospitality in that day was perhaps foremost among the virtues. We see it in the culture as far back as Abraham. The Lord comes and visits him and he slaughters a calf, “tender and good,” and Sarah makes cakes for their eating pleasure. This was how you cared for people. And a wedding would show this all the more. You would pull out all of the stops for days. For a week even. That was the biggest feast and the greatest show of hospitality. And of course you had to have wine. This is a feast after all! Like I said, you pull out all of the stops!

But then here is this poor family in Cana. Apparently they over extended themselves. They're trying to be good hosts, they got their master of the feast in place, they serving everything freely apparently, but lo, what happens? They've run out of wine! For shame! No, really, this would have been a huge faux pas. You didn't want to run out of wine. What will they do? The guests will grumble, perhaps leave, their

reputation will be destroyed. They'll not recover from this easily. There really will be shame.

And then Mary comes in. She knows how to protect them. She cares for them like Joseph cared for her, and so she calls upon her Son to step up to the predicament. She doesn't even have to consult with Him, she doesn't have to hear His directions, she just knows. And she tells the others to listen. So what does Jesus do? He redeems them out their shame. Here they are on the brink a social crisis, and He rescues them. Of course, this isn't what we might think of as a dire emergency, but it all fits, and Jesus is going to manifest His glory there and then.

And so He has the servants fill jars with water. Now these jars are jars made for washing. If anyone were to become unclean from contact with a dead body or from a bodily discharge, or a skin ailment, or any of the various other causes of uncleanness, they would wash in these. And these jars were big. As John tells us, they could hold 20 or 30 gallons a piece. And how many were filled? Six. That's a lot of water. But then what? All of that water was wine. The crisis was averted. In fact, not only was it averted but the redemption that came was abundant. Here there were six jars of wine, six large jars, somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons of wine. That somewhere between about 650-950 bottles in our day. That's a lot of wine. And it wasn't even just wine, it was the best of the wine. Here Jesus' redemption was not just coming in saving the day, it took the situation from one of danger to an entirely new level of secure. This meant that the people would be talking about that wedding for a long time.

And what do we see in this? We see a most beautiful glimpse of eternal glory. What do I mean? Well, look at the details. When does this wedding happen? The third day. The Third Day of what? Well that's something interesting. You see, in John there seems to a first day when John the Baptist is preaching about Jesus, then a second day when Jesus is baptized, then a next day when Jesus calls His first disciples, then a next day when He calls Phillip and Nathaniel, then this third day. A sixth day in this sequence. The day of creation when Man was made, when man and woman were made and married. But not just any sixth day, the third day in a sequence. The third day, as in Jesus' own words eighteen verses later in this very chapter, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up"—not the temple of Jerusalem, but the resurrection Jesus' body.

So we have a glimpse of the resurrection. And of course, Jesus' own resurrection points to what? The day when we as His own body will rise in the same fashion that

our head rose. This promise of the resurrection at the end. And what will be there? A wedding. The wedding of the Lamb. The Lamb, Jesus who will descend as the Bridegroom, coming to rescue and marry His bride, the Church. And He will bring them to a feast. Not just a feast like we have, not just a feast like this wedding. No that feast will be far greater. The things we enjoy now, it seems will be that much more magnificent. The tastes will be that much grander; the textures that much more sumptuous. The wine that much more luxurious. And it won't end. People won't have to talk about its grandeur after the fact, because there won't be an after the fact.

But of course, at this wedding, the miracle of the wine, while pointing to these glorious things, while seemingly odd in itself, draws us back to the reality that this is only a glimpse. After all, why do we think that it's so odd that Jesus turned water into wine? First of all because of what wine does: it intoxicates. We say this all the more because it's clear that the crowd has already been served. The master of the feast makes that point: **"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."** He's saying, "Why did you wait until the senses of the guests are already dulled to serve them the finest wine you have?"

And why? Because our senses are dulled by sin. Why? Because this is just that glimpse. Why? Well, as a professor of mine made the point with regard to the Lord's Supper: there is an intoxicating quality there. The Lord Himself even makes the point of that gift when He says in the Psalms that He gives wine to gladden the heart of man. But that this is a glimpse is proven all the more by what we do with that wine. Yes, it's given to gladden our hearts, but do we just gladden them? No, we do what we do with ever good gift: we abuse it. If gladdening is good, drunk must be better, right? But what does the Lord say? **"Be sober-minded; be watchful,"** as Peter says. Paul tells us, **"do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit."** In other words, the Lord is our strength and our joy, not intoxication. But we abuse it. And we see in that abuse, yes this is a good gift from God but in our sin we can't keep it in check. We are so broken that we'll mess it up again and again.

And with that, then just as Jesus performed this sign to manifest His glory, as John told us what we're looking for, truly it's not the water turned into wine. No instead we look to the greatest manifestation of that glory, the time when Christ's hour had truly come: the cross. We look to this miracle worker nailed to the tree and cursed; cursed for our sin. Cursed for our abuse of His gifts, cursed because we fail in our hospitality,

our generosity, our faithfulness, our prayers. Cursed because we don't trust in Him and we don't love one another. Cursed.

But there on the cross is the glory that loves us. The Glory incarnate come down from heaven at Christmas, and revealing that glory on the cross, with life and blood shed for you, and proven with the resurrection on the greatest Third Day: Easter. And now in the glory, in that manifestation of the Glory of the Lord, you have life from your sin. You have hope in the darkness of the life around you which manifests suffering. You have hope in the promise of your own sign. Not the sign of water turned into wine, but in wine giving you the blood of Jesus shed for you on the cross.

At this rail, Christians, the same Jesus who went to that wedding to give a glimpse of eternity comes to you and gives you a greater glimpse: His body and blood which were raised and in their resurrection promise the resurrection of your own body. And in that promise you have the guarantee of your own Third Day.

Listen to what that will look like from Revelation: **“And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”** And there is the beauty of that feast: not that we'll be with our loved ones, not that we'll be in “heaven,” no that the God who created the whole Universe, who created us and gives us our very breath, the God who redeemed you in Jesus, that He'll be there, and He'll be your perfect groom, wiping away your every tear, annihilating them that they will be gone. There is your joy.

So why water into wine? That you would see His glory. Glory of beauty? Yes. Glory of truth? Yes. Most of all glory of love and joy in your redemption in Him. So Christians, believe in that glory. Cling to it, and know that in the Glory made flesh, in Jesus your redeemer, you have the One who has redeemed you and will raise you upon His return to be His blessed bride enjoying His eternal wedding feast celebrating the joy of His life with you. Amen.