

The Second Sunday after Epiphany
St. John 2:1-11: "Jesus Loves an Imperfect Bride."
January 13/14, 2018 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

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Lord Jesus, teach us to pray You to come to our weddings, and to come and sanctify our home life. Guide us and reign among us, and help us, for You alone can do it. Amen. (Laache's *Book of Family Prayer*, p. 118)

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. (Rom. 1:7, etc.)

The sermon text for today is taken from the second chapter of the Gospel according to St. John. We read selected verses in Jesus' name:

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with His disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." / And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." / His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever He tells you." / Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. / And He said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "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." / This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested His glory. And His disciples believed in Him. ^(ESV)

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen. (Jn. 17:17)

In Christ Jesus, the Bridegroom of the Church, who provides all that is needed for the eternal wedding feast, dear fellow redeemed:

Most of the things we do on any given day will not be remembered for long. We wouldn't expect them to be. There is nothing too impressive about logging hours at work and taking care of duties at home. These are things that most everyone does. But there are certain events and happenings that people recognize as "history in the making." This could be witnessing the home team win the championship. Or it could be having a visit from someone famous or receiving an award for a job well done. Moments like these are not soon forgotten.

A memorable time in the lives of many people is the day of their wedding. So much planning and preparation goes into that day—the guest list, the service, the reception hall, the clothing, the flowers, the decorations, the photographer. It all comes together in one grand event and culminates in a shared promise: "Will you have this woman to be your wedded wife? ...I will." "Will you have this man to be your wedded husband? ...I will." It is not an event that receives much notice in the world. But for the newly married couple, it is life-changing. Their history,

which before this was tied most closely to their families, is now tied most closely to their spouse.

I

More often than not, the bride and groom feel great optimism on their wedding day. They are uniting with the person they love the most. Whatever the future holds, whether good or bad, they will meet it together, hand in hand. Their love will conquer all. No challenge or obstacle will affect them. It will only make them stronger and deepen their love toward each other. They cannot imagine what could ever pull them apart.

But no matter how much time and money are spent to make the wedding day a “perfect” day, that day is followed by another and another. The feelings of elation that came with their union as husband and wife begin to dissipate. They come down out of the clouds and face the challenges that have gone from theoretical to actual.

Before long, they experience the strain that sin puts on marriage. They learn things about each other they did not know before and are not sure they like. They find it difficult to resolve their problems and communicate effectively. Over time, husband and wife might withdraw from each other and seek answers or happiness in places that make their problems much, much worse. How could something that starts so well, go so wrong?

Let’s go back to how a marriage starts. As much as people worry about taking care of all the little details of the wedding day, one major thing often escapes their notice. They forget about one very important guest – the only guest that can make the day what it should be and deliver the kind of happy marriage that the bride and bridegroom desire.

A wedding and a marriage without Jesus is a union that must rely on two people who are thoroughly flawed. It must rely on their imperfect promises, their imperfect love, their imperfect commitment. Some of these marriages last, but many do not. On the other hand, a marriage founded on Christ and sustained by Christ is not easily broken. Then the power source to keep a marriage going does not come from inside a person, from the heart or from the will. The power source comes from the outside, from Jesus through His Word and Sacraments. The most important question for a man and a woman to ask as they prepare for their marriage is: Will Jesus be present?

Jesus was present at a wedding in the town of Cana some ten miles north of his hometown of Nazareth. The fact that He and His mother were invited along with Jesus’ disciples, indicates that this was the wedding of a relative or close friend. Jesus was certainly welcome, but He hardly stood out among the guests. At this time He had done no miracles. There was no excitement about Him like there would be later. But Mary seemed to be expecting this to change. When she learned that the wine for the banquet had run out, she immediately told her Son about it. *“Woman, what does this have to do with Me?”* He asked. *“My hour has not yet come.”* Undaunted, she directed the servants to *“Do whatever He tells you.”*

Meanwhile, the lack of wine threatened to cast a cloud over a joyous occasion. What could end a wedding celebration faster than the closing of the bar? As unfortunate as this was, it does not seem like a situation that required divine action. But Jesus thought otherwise. He showed that

small problems are just as important to Him as big ones. He determined that this wedding banquet was the right place to begin to manifest His glory.

II

Now imagine that you were one of those servants standing at attention that day. What would you have been thinking when Jesus asked you to *"Fill the jars with water"*? You probably wouldn't know what to think, except that you would be pretty sure this would do nothing to solve the wine problem. Still you would do as you were told. But when you were asked to *"draw some out and take it to the master of the feast,"* you would have imagined that this was a waste of time, and it might even get you in trouble. What could you say when the master of the feast asked you to explain why you bothered him to taste some water!

This is how it seems to people when we tell them that every marriage needs Jesus. What good can He do? How can He help my strained relationship? I need real solutions, not religion! But we shouldn't sell Jesus short. He knows something about marriage. In fact, He is the one who created it. When the LORD took Adam's rib and made a woman from it to be his helper, that was the institution of marriage. The last part of Genesis 2 says, *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh"* (v. 24).

"They shall become one flesh"—that is how God sees a husband and wife, as one. And from the marital union of man and woman comes children who are the physical manifestation of this oneness. The union of marriage is so sacred in God's sight, that He wants it to endure until death parts it. Jesus said, *"What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate"* (Mt. 19:6).

Now we know that God permits divorce in cases of unfaithfulness or desertion. But nowhere in Scripture does God permit divorce simply because feelings have changed, or because husband and wife don't love each other like they used to, or because they just can't work through their differences. These excuses are not godly; they come from selfishness and pride. Just think if Jesus said, *"I would love to have people with Me in heaven, but we just aren't getting along. I'm just not seeing them step up like they are supposed to. If they change their behavior, then maybe I'll change my mind."*

Jesus did not wait for us to show love to Him; He loved us even when we had wandered far away in sin. The Apostle Paul wrote, *"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish"* (Eph. 5:25-27). Jesus did that for you and me when we deserved the exact opposite. We deserved the silent treatment from God, and for Him to do to us as we had done to Him. Instead He gave and loved and sacrificed, so that we could become something different than we were, so that we could be cleansed of our sins and stand in holiness before God.

The servants could never have imagined that the water in those stone jars would become fine wine. In the same way there are many who don't think their marital problems can be fixed. Why even try? It would just be a waste of time. Jesus does not agree. He says, *"For all things are possible with God"* (Mk. 10:27). He made of water what no one thought He could, and He can do the same with a marriage, turning a sour situation into fine wine. The question is, are husband and wife humble enough, as the servants were, to draw out some water from the jar? Are they

humble enough to listen to what God says in His Word? Are they ready to acknowledge their own sins and not the shortcomings of the other? This is a difficult task, but it is not impossible.

Not only is it possible, we know that God wants it. No matter what our station is in life, the Lord wants us repent of our sins and humbly hear His Word. What kind of people would we be if we knew all that God has done for us in Christ, but then live like it never even happened? We would be like servants who witnessed water becoming wine, but then ignored the man who made it happen. For their part, the disciples of Jesus believed in Him. They recognized “history in the making,” and knew that God had kept His commitment and promise to His people to send them a Savior.

God always keeps His promises. He promises to bless marriage. He promises to bless the hearing and keeping of His Word. He promises to bless those who bow before Him with broken and contrite hearts. He can fill an empty cup and make it overflow with sweet spiritual drink, so that thirst is quenched and the spirit rejuvenated. The Lord will not fail to do this because **He Loves His Imperfect Bride** and forgives all of her sins.

Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, forevermore. Amen.

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