

The Second Sunday after Epiphany
St. John 2:1-11: "Jesus Manifests His Glory in Humble Service."
January 19/20, 2019 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

In Nomine Iesu

+ + +

O Lord Christ, who by Your presence and first miracle at Cana of Galilee adorned and beautified the holy estate of matrimony: We beseech You to sanctify the marriage bond in the life of our people, and to bless our homes with Your abiding presence; for the honor and glory of Your name. Amen. (*Parish Prayers*, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 46)

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 became 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, our Bridegroom, who visits us through His Word and Sacraments, "*that we may rejoice and be glad all our days*" (Psa. 90:14), dear fellow redeemed:

John the Baptizer lived a life of extreme self-discipline. He wore rough camel's hair clothing. He ate insects and wild honey. He drank no alcohol. His calling was not to enjoy the good things of the world, but to "*be filled with the Holy Spirit*" (Joh. 1:15), and to "*prepare the way for the Lord*" (Luk. 3:4). His disciples joined him in this disciplined life. When's John's disciples were later contrasted with Jesus' disciples, John's disciples were said to "*fast often*" while Jesus' disciples ate and drank freely (Luk. 5:33).

This must have been surprising to the disciples of John who began to follow Jesus. One of these was Andrew, and two others were likely John and Peter. They joined Jesus when He left the area where John the Baptizer was working and traveled back to Galilee. There, Jesus called two more men to follow Him, Philip and Nathanael. The next event recorded in the Gospels is the

wedding in the town of Cana. Jesus and His mother Mary were relatives or close friends of the bride or groom, because Jesus was invited to attend along with His new friends.

His disciples must have noticed right away how different Jesus was than John the Baptizer. We assume that Jesus enjoyed the food and drink offered at the wedding, though obviously not to excess. The other guests took the celebrating a bit further and exhausted the supply of wine. This was a problem. The celebration was not supposed to end, but it could not continue as before without more wine. Mary wondered if Jesus would do something and directed the matter to Him.

I

To this point, Jesus had not used His divine power in a public way. But now He asked the servants at the wedding celebration to fill six stone jars with water. And in a moment that makes every good Baptist feel uncomfortable, Jesus miraculously turned the water into wine. When the master of the feast tasted it, He told the bridegroom that most people serve poorer wine after people have "*drunk freely*." "But," he said, "*you have kept the good wine until now*."

It may be surprising that the production of alcohol would be Jesus' first public sign. But the Lord has nothing against alcohol. What He warns about is the abuse of alcohol. The Israelites were certainly accustomed to drinking wine, and it was an integral part of their Passover celebration. Using unleavened bread and wine from the Passover meal, Jesus later instituted His Holy Supper. And when the LORD described the eternal wedding feast in heaven, He specifically mentioned that "*aged wine well refined*" (*Isa. 25:6*) would be present.

Alcohol is a blessing when used in the proper way. The apostle Paul even recommended "*a little wine*" to his friend Timothy, "*for the sake of [his] stomach and [his] frequent ailments*" (*1Ti. 5:23*). But alcohol is often used improperly, and the devil knows how to tempt people to sin through it. The book of Proverbs warns about this: "*Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder. Your eyes will see strange things, and your heart utter perverse things*" (*Pro. 23:31-33*). The New Testament contains the same warning (*Eph. 5:18*), and it says that drunkards "*will not inherit the kingdom of God*" unless they repent (*1Co. 6:10*).

Alcohol often makes bad situations worse, as the country singer acknowledges: "I drink because I'm lonesome, and I'm lonesome 'cause I drink" (Chris Stapleton). But alcohol can also make happy situations more joyful. A famous English author proposed this guide for alcohol use: "Drink because you are happy, but never because you are miserable. Never drink when you are wretched without it, or you will be like the grey-faced gin-drinker in the slum; but drink when you would be happy without it, and you will be like the laughing peasant of Italy" (G. K. Chesterton, *Heretics*, ch. 7).

In the case of the wedding in Cana, wine was present at the celebration not to dull pain, but to increase joy. Jesus approved of this celebration and was glad to play a part in extending it. We might have expected Jesus to make a bigger splash with His first public miracle. He could have produced food supplies for the poor, healed a prominent member of the community, or demonstrated His control over nature. Instead, He manifested His glory by changing water into wine at a wedding.

But that was fitting too. The Lord had not come to rub elbows with the elites. He came to be a blessing to all people. He was glad to be attending the wedding of a poor couple in a small, out-of-the-way town. This shows us that no situation we are in is below the Lord's concern. He cares about our marriages, our families, our health, our work, and the challenges we face. We may not see any way to get past our problems, but He knows how to bring blessings out of trials.

II

So Jesus turned water into wine, "*and manifested His glory.*" In part, this was intended as a sign for His disciples, and they "*believed in Him.*" But what He had told His mother was still true, "*My hour has not yet come.*" The time to reveal Himself as the promised Messiah had come, but there was more for Him to do before His suffering, death, and resurrection. For three years, Jesus traveled between Galilee and Judea preaching the Gospel, healing the sick, casting out demons, and raising the dead. He was equally willing to spend time with the spiritual leaders of the Jews as with the spiritual outcasts.

The scribes and Pharisees did not appreciate this, particularly when Jesus criticized them and absolved the open sinners. For how concerned they were with God's Law, they did not like having it leveled against them. John the Baptizer had done this, and now Jesus was doing it too. Jesus pointed out to them that the problem was not with Him and John, but with their own corrupt hearts. He exposed their self-righteous thinking, "*For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'*" (Luk. 7:33-34).

Their spiteful attacks did not change His loving purpose and work. He continued to show mercy to the people around Him in humble service. Just before His entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, Jesus told His disciples, "*the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*" (Mat. 20:28). This is why He came and was manifested to the world. He came in humility "*to give his life as a ransom for many.*"

After riding into Jerusalem on a donkey, Jesus declared, "*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified*" (Joh. 12:22). His glory would come through His death. He was "*betrayed into the hands of sinners*" (Mar. 14:41) and handed over to be crucified. Paul writes that Christ "*made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross*" (Phi. 2:7-8).

Through His humble sacrifice, Jesus paid for our many sins. These sins include our worry that His love for us may run out, our overindulgence in earthly things where moderation is called for, and our failure to see the great blessings God has provided us, especially the blessings of marriage and family. Jesus took these sins upon Himself and suffered for them, so God now declares us absolved of every sin.

This forgiveness of sin is imparted to us through the means of grace. These humble means are the ways that Jesus continues His humble service to us today. He comes to us through the

preaching of the Gospel, through the water of Baptism, and through the bread and wine of Holy Communion. By partaking of these things with faith, we join the wedding feast of salvation.

And who are the bride and bridegroom at this feast? Jesus is the Bridegroom, and all believers in Him are the bride. Jesus wedded Himself to the human race by taking on our flesh and dying for the world's sins. We sinners are joined to Him through Baptism, by which we are presented to Him "*in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing*" (*Eph. 5:27*). We are holy in God's sight because of what Jesus did for us. Our sins are covered over by His righteousness.

By Baptism we were buried with Him in His death and raised with Him to new life. Through this union with Christ, we are called by His name, and we gain His own reputation and status. We common sinners are now joined to the holy King! We share in His glory, though it is a glory hidden in this world.

Soon this glory of our Bridegroom will be manifested for everyone to see. Then His humble work of salvation will be acknowledged by all, and His followers will join Him at the heavenly feast. There, such rejoicing will take place that cannot be imagined now. But we can be sure that our troubles will be forgotten, our joy will be full, and the supply of God's abundant blessings will never run dry.

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.

+ + +