

2nd Sunday after Epiphany C 19 January 2025

John 2:1-11

St Peter's Lutheran Church, Elizabeth

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Grace and peace to you from God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The steward called the bridegroom and 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.' Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. Let's pray: ...

For most of this year, we'll hear from the Gospel of Luke. But as with other major events that focus on Jesus, today we hear from John's Gospel. We hear of Jesus' first act of ministry in this Gospel, and it's quite unusual.

The other Gospels start out with very different ministries: Proclaiming the good news, healing, and the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew [4:12-7:29], an exorcism in Mark [1:14-28], and a sermon in the synagogue in Luke [4:14-30]. But in John, the first act of ministry performed by Jesus is that he turns water into wine.

This miracle looks strange even in the context of John's Gospel, when we consider the signs that follow:

- Healing a paralysed person,
- Feeding a crowd of five thousand,
- Walking on water,
- Healing a blind man,
- Raising Lazarus from the dead, and
- Washing the disciples' feet.

Among these, it's the first one, turning water into wine, that seems odd. Why does Jesus start out his ministry supplying wine for a party?

Why not do something a little more significant?

Well, let's examine the situation; a first-century Jewish wedding in a village named Cana, just down the road from Nazareth. Weddings then were an even bigger deal than they are today.

For one thing, they had little competition. The people didn't have sport, television, movie theatres, computer games, or many of the other distractions and temptations we have today. But they did have weddings; partying was important, and they certainly made the most of the occasion!

Back then, a wedding didn't last for a few hours, or even a day. It went on for seven days and the entire community was invited. Wine was essential. It's not that people got plastered. They drank wine mixed with water, and they drank it in a particular social context. Drinking was very rarely a problem; rather, it was part of the fun.

So, this young couple, just married, ran out of wine in the middle of their wedding feast. What an embarrassment! A major disaster! Everybody will be talking about it! Fifty years from now, when they totter in to celebrate their golden anniversary, some grey-haired grump will snipe, "I remember their wedding. They ran out of wine!"

Among the guests is Mary. Obviously, she's no longer the young girl in the Nativity story. Jesus and a group of his followers are there with her. Mary, astutely taking in everything that's going on, notices when the last wine jug is emptied and wants to avoid a social disaster for the young couples' sake. So, she brings the matter to Jesus' attention.

Jesus seems indifferent about it. But Mary tells the attendants to do whatever Jesus tells them to do, as the moment is fast approaching when this joyous wedding celebration is about to bomb. So, Jesus acts. He tells the attendants to fill half a dozen big stone jars with water and drag them over to the banquet manager.

I can't imagine their bemusement with such an odd request, but maybe the attendants have the jitters over the sudden shortage of wine and are willing to welcome a strange suggestion. Maybe they think a big tip could be on the cards. Who knows? Whatever the case, they fill up the jars which, mind you, are the size of small barrels, and roll them over to the banquet manager. I can imagine he's sweating bullets by now and probably wondering whether a new career in begging might be an advantageous move.

He nervously takes a sip and, Hallelujah! It's really good wine! Not the cheap stuff; but, the Penfolds Grange Shiraz! This Cana vintage, only a few minutes old, is top shelf, and there's enough to bathe in (roughly 900 bottles today).

The banquet manager orders the attendants to start pouring as though their lives depend on it. Breathing a deep sigh of relief, he leans forward and whispers to the groom about how it's strange that he's saved the best wine until last. The groom barely hears him. The room is ringing with the sound of silverware tapping against glasses as the guests demand that he give the bride yet another kiss.

What a way to launch his ministry, hey! Does it seem odd to you? What's going on here? The first thing Jesus does is to act compassionately, meeting the needs of people where they are. It also says something about the significance of marriage in the eyes of God. But something more is going on here, something that concerns everybody, not just the married among us or those in need of immediate help.

John places great emphasis on signs in his Gospel. When we look at the wedding episode or any of the other signs in John, what stands out is that some people understand their significance, and some don't.

Consider the cast of characters at the wedding celebration. Mary, the disciples, and the attendants apparently catch on to the wonder of water changed into wine. On the other hand, the banquet manager, the groom and his bride, and most of their guests apparently don't have a clue what's going on. Yet, the wine is there just as much for them as it is for everyone else.

This story reveals something we so often overlook about life. Miracles happen. Signs of Jesus at work appear all around us. They happen whether or not we acknowledge them. They benefit us whether or not we notice them. Yet, it's a joy to see these signs for what they are, and believe in Jesus, to whom they point.

What we think of as miracles aren't weird exceptions to the orderly laws of the universe. They have the same origin. Indeed, they teach us the context surrounding those laws:

First, the miracles of Jesus are the ordinary works of his Father.

And second; I want you to listen very closely to this, Jesus, who made the wine that day at the marriage feast, does exactly the same thing every year in Matthew and Lisa's vines. Yet, we're not captivated by it because it happens every year; we've lost our sense of marvel and we take it for granted because it's a constant occurrence.

However, to grow in grace means that we need to become increasingly aware and appreciate that everything in life is a miracle, a sign pointing to Christ. St Basil the Great [330AD-January 1, 379AD], an early Bishop of Caesarea said:

"All the objects in the world are an invitation to faith, not unbelief."

He taught that to be "in Christ", means engaging the world and all of its problems, trials, and tribulations with radical trust that God will deliver us and provide for us.

Perhaps the Wedding at Cana appears first in the Gospel of John because in reality the world is a wedding celebration. Jesus transforms the water of ordinariness into the wine of miracles. Everyone benefits from these transformations. Some know the cause of them, while others don't. To share our faith means letting others know that signs are abundant, and Christ is the one to whom they point.

So, the wedding at Cana continues to this very day. It's celebrated not only at this table, this feast of grace, but also when we leave here to encounter Christ active throughout the whole world. Not only here, but in our daily lives as well, Jesus changes the humdrum of everyday existence that wears us down, into the wonder that renews us, fills us with life, and makes us glad. The signs of Christ are everywhere, constantly revealing his glory, and he offers us the best wine now. Dear Saints, and that is exactly what you are; your very life is a miracle to appreciate. Hear again God's promise to you through his prophet Isaiah [62:5]:

"For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."

Church, my fervent prayer for you is that you will always point to Christ the bridegroom, live, love, and tip a glass to God's great glory. Party on! Amen.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds safe in Christ Jesus. Amen.