

Michael J. Mathey
Epiphany II & Life Sunday
January 19, 2025

Text: John 2:1 – 11

Title: If These Jars Could Talk (based on a CPR sermon from Rev. M. W. Salemink)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Today's Gospel reading about the wedding at Cana is a familiar account from God's Word. St. John tells us about the first public sign that Jesus did, turning six large stone jars filled with water into the choicest of wines at a wedding feast. There's a lot that we can look at in this reading. The way that Jesus talks to His mother, which the Greek shows us is a lot more respectable than it seems to be in English. Mary's confidence that her son will be able to help the embarrassing situation, or the way that Jesus says that His time hasn't come yet.

But today, on this Life Sunday, I want to start looking at this account by focusing on the six stone jars. Each one can hold between 20 or 30 gallons, or up to 180 gallons altogether. Each one is there so that the wedding guests can perform the purification rites of washing with water according to the Jewish ceremonial laws. Each large, hard, stone jar stands as a firm, unrelenting, and harsh reminder then of the heavy burdens of God's Law, just like the two stone tablets God first wrote His Law on with His own hand.

If these jars could talk, what would they say? As representatives of God's Holy Law they might say, "We know who you are. We know your name, and we know your deepest and darkest secrets." They would stand there and tattle for all to hear saying, "You with the greedy fingers, you need to be purified. You with the lustful eyes, you must be cleaned. You there, with the indulgent belly, you could use a good sanitizing." With a voice that can reach the whole wide world you would hear these jars call out to you, "You with the proud attitude who has to have everything your way, you must drown! You there, with the arrogant heart that believes it knows best, you need to be scoured clean! You with the

fiery tongue, you must soak, your time for extinguishing has come!” If these jars could talk, they’d say, “Why bother trying? You’re just going to screw things up again. You’ll ruin this one just like you ruin everything else!”

Oh, the details might change from age to age, but the story’s plot is always the same. Six stone jars stand watch and open their mouths to speak for the Law, from age to age the same, and the life issues that confront us with the Law today are just like the six stone jars. Life issues like experiments on embryos, assisted suicide, and abortion, they affect you. These matters, where the devil deceives people into viewing death as a solution to distress, they involve you. These conversations about disability, depression, dementia, they do apply to you. These debates about infertility, contraception, and unexpected pregnancy, about discomfort and diagnoses, about abuse and addiction and grief and guilt, they all concern you whether you like it or not, whether you believe it or not. And that’s ultimately why we don’t want to address them, isn’t it? It’s why we’d rather have no big deal made of such evils. We realize that once the fingers start pointing, they’ll soon take aim at us. We realize that when the convicting begins, our case and its iniquities will come up way too soon.

You have your own indiscretions too, don’t you? You have your secrets and your skeletons, your mistakes and your failures. You’ve gratified your flesh’s appetites and made idols of its urges. You’ve engaged your sexuality with someone other than your spouse. You’ve lent your voice to popular sentiments, but bitten your lip when godly truths, the tough and politically incorrect ones, needed to be spoken. You’ve contemplated violence against somebody or even your own body to lessen suffering, but more to stem your own suffering than theirs. You’ve considered making one neighbor or another go away because they represented an interruption to your whims and a hindrance to your impulses. You’ve exploited sisters for your entertainment and used brothers for your advancement. You’ve neglected responsibilities to family and discarded obligations to community. You’ve ignored

pleas for help and overlooked opportunities to save the vulnerable. You've dispensed with the truth of God's doctrines when they've become uncomfortable or even just inconvenient, and you've devised thin disguises and flung out flimsy excuses for all of it.

So we want our options left open. We want all escapes left available. But the stone jars stand in our way. Our sidestepping hasn't succeeded in silencing them. If anything, it only invites them to object louder. Reality bends, but only so far, and then it snaps back and slaps us in the face, every time. These Life issues are simple and clear, and we know it. "You shall not murder" has no gray areas, no mitigating circumstances, no legitimately different perspectives. The Law demands perfect compliance, restitution, atonement, and amends. God's Law isn't the problem; we are. It has stone; we have flesh with our rebellious and selfish nature. The Law demands blood, yours and mine, all of it, six stone jars full of it. If you bury your head in the sand to ignore the problem, it just exposes your neck.

So thanks be to God these jars cannot talk. Jars of stone can't talk at all, but they do echo. And Jesus has made these stone jars into echoing bullhorns for His own words. Jesus has made Cana's six stone jars into His own personal PA system.

He didn't start all of this at Cana – "...what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come," He says – but He will finish it. Jesus Christ takes on the six jars, takes them up, and He takes them over. God's Son enters into the plain and the painful, the life-and-death, good vs. evil. He ladles His own wholeness and holiness, spills full-strength extract of heaven's intervention down their stone throats. It splashes and saturates their mouths with two-hundred proof elixir of Almighty God as He says, "I got this." Creator Incarnate distills pure mercy directly into the jars' jaws. The Savior invades those jars, inhabits and occupies their accusations, endures and abides their curses Himself on the cross. He dies to take responsibility for the ruin, the screw-up, the wreckage of us all.

Then Jesus makes them echo the joyful sweetness of His Gospel. Filled to overflowing, the stone jars now echo and proclaim atonement offered. These jars declare everything Jesus secured by His suffering and death on that cross: amends made, price paid, debts settled. They shout accounts balanced, wrath exacted, punishment satisfied, justice served, sins forgiven, offenders exonerated. The Lord Jesus causes six stone jars to ring out the new song of the Father's compassion, resurrection everlasting, and His heavenly kingdom. He draws out of these jars promises instead of regrets, joy and hope replace fear and guilt for all who believe. He coaxes forth crescendoing tones of sanctity and significance and salvation that embrace each wayward woman as a bride. He wrenches relief and healing, peace and rest, privileges and purpose that receives every wandered-off man as a groom. And the jars, those same stone jars, they can't help but holler and herald Him as Immanuel. He rules as Intercessor for whom no situation's too tiny, no condition's too trivial, no cause too hopeless or lost. He reigns as Redeemer, crucified and risen, for whom impossible, terminal, tragic, chronic, or uncertain only means opportunity because His power is made perfect in weakness. For Jesus, God's Son, does not change or fail, ever. From age to age unto eternity, He is the same. As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.

With the steadfastness of stone, the jars still echo. Life issues reverberate like jars with reasons for rejoicing from age to age the same. Jesus makes Life issues echo His sweet things just like Cana's jars. Zygotes and embryos serve as signs of how God meticulously knit each of us together proclaiming you and all human beings special. Chronic pain and terminal illness remind us that He became flesh, that He carried our sorrows to the cross and reconciled the universe, that He accompanies us through the very valley of the shadow of death itself which He has already walked through, proving you and every person precious. Dementia and disability, unresponsive and incapacitated cases all resound with how He calls into His household, how He connects eternally to His Church, how He makes temples out of all

bodies with His Holy Spirit, pronouncing you and every human being priceless. Guilt and grief – even from involvement in abortion, assisted suicide, or other decisions toward death – introduce a tune to which God’s grace conducts a completion. His unconditional love that drove Him to sacrifice His life on Calvary gives you and every human life worth, regardless of age, appearance, abilities, or even past sinful actions.

Jesus’ Gospel echoes help us to remember that procreation and pregnancy recall the baptismal relationship in which God births us into His family and binds Himself as the Father to fallen sinners and broken creatures forever. Sexuality and marriage reaffirm the Holy Communion, where He offers His body, blood, and life to the benefit and enjoyment of undeserving ones. Difficult conversations, emotional debates, controversy, and advocacy cue the Word of God that lights the road to life immortal. Unanswered prayers, unfulfilled longings, mysteries, and anxieties nod to faith, which waits upon God’s times and terms, and hope, which rests in His good and gracious will. The sweetness of His Gospel echoes will linger long after the worlds’ ways and the merriments of men fade away to nothingness.

For decades, with the help of Lutherans for Life Christians have shared these great echoes of the Gospel with the world as it chases after its love of death. God’s truth and love of Life has been declared with the courage that God Himself has given. Christ’s compassionate love reflected from Him and demonstrated to those who hurt has been proclaimed and put into action because He has loved us, even the least of us. With God’s blessing we will continue to contemplate and celebrate His gift of Life in worship, and we will continue to educate people to think and talk about God’s gift of Life. By the grace of God we can and will treat both our own life and our neighbor’s life as the privilege and treasure that it is to us and to the Lord, worth to Him even the death of His only Son on the cross. From age to age, be it ages of civilizations or the age of individuals, God never gives up, and neither do His people. The work has only begun, and the best is yet to come! Amen. In the name of the Father...