

Sermon for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany January 19, 2025 jj
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(Jesus first miracle, the wedding at Cana)

Jesus turned water into wine, three days after He was baptized, to manifest His glory, that is, make it plain as day for others to see what John had already testified: Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He did it so that His disciples would then believe in Him. John the Gospel-writer designated this as the “first of His signs,” because there would be more miracles to come that would bear witness to the all-important event of our forgiveness, that time which Jesus called “My Hour.” Yes, you could also note the supreme trust that His Mother Mary had in Him, and we would be wise as well to put every one of our problems into His hands. And you get in this story an amusing way to prove to others that Jesus didn’t have a problem with alcohol in and of itself. He approves of a modest amount for the purpose of enjoying what He has made. But don’t rule out also that this unusual miracle includes with it Christ’s blessing of the institution of marriage, which God Himself began and blessed in the perfect creation, before there was sin.

Why would Jesus choose a wedding as the place for His first miracle? What was the particular blessing that would be given? For one thing, getting married is not an achievement of man, not some rite of passage or business contract for a person to do or not to do, it’s truly a gift of God.

Perhaps we should think of Jesus choosing a wedding feast for His first miracle because marriage is the one human relationship that ties all of us together—including everyone who is not right now married. On this Life Sunday it is appropriate for us Lutherans to claim that Marriage was originally and still remains God’s foundational, life-giving and life-affirming institution. Even if you are single or widowed,

if you are divorced or it will be awhile until you might marry, you still have family relationships that God has given to you on account of marriage. Brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, aunts and uncles all comprise the fruit and flower of marriage. Beyond that, all government, all friendships and all business relationships might likewise be traceable to marriage, if for no other reason than for the fact that we all have Adam as our father and Eve as our mother. God gave His gift of marriage to our literal first parents (Genesis 2:21-25) and from that one marriage has come forth every human relationship on earth. If a marriage becomes defined as something else besides what God says it is, it is not, and never will be, a marriage no matter what a government would try to say. God has the last word on it, period.

It’s odd, Jesus seemed ready to pass up on the opportunity to solve the problem that Mary posed to Him in the midst of a wedding. They had no wine. A time for celebration was about to end in disaster and a cloud of shame. But see, Jesus is not entirely against enjoyment and pleasure, and of course He is not approving of drunkenness at all. Replenishing an empty wine jug is not the real act of salvation; remember John wrote this miracle was a sign—that is, something letting you know about something else, something greater yet to come.

The miracle at Cana is “the first of His signs.” These Words “the first of His signs” suggest that this miracle is the elder brother, so to speak, of all our Lord’s other miracles. This miracle is the prototype, the outline, the kick-off for all the miracles following, up to and including His greatest sign, the resurrection. In this, His first miracle, Jesus “manifested His glory”, and the glory of Jesus extends to people of ALL NATIONS.

Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the purification 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 [and] the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine.

As it is with all His miracles, Christ our Lord is teaching us that we can rely upon Him, and trust in Him. I know it does not always feel as though you can rely upon Jesus while you struggle and labor every day with your various crosses in life. Jesus knows that you do not always feel convinced and content that you can trust Him. It seems like He is going to pass up yet another opportunity to help you out of your disaster and cloud of shame. You get frustrated; you get dejected. The law points out your sins and failures and you feel powerless to overcome them. You have run out of the wine of enjoyment in this faith marriage that you have to Christ your Bridegroom. That is part of the reason why your dear Lord gives you this miracle at Cana. What has Christ done here today?

He promises—and demonstrates—that He will provide for each of us, according to our need. His abundance will never fail to flow for us at the proper time—neither a moment too late nor too soon. Christ shows us in today’s Gospel that we can confidently look to Him for all things, just as His mother Mary looked at Jesus and boldly said to Him that simple prayer, that doesn’t at first sound to us like a prayer, “They have no wine.” Christ Jesus wants each of us to share in Mary’s confidence and certainty. She has faith that was also given to you in Baptism. It was Mary who said to the Angel Gabriel, who had brought news that she would be Mother of Our Lord, “Let it be to me according to God’s Word.” Now, thirty years later, she turned and said to the servants, “Do whatever He tells you.” With these Words, Mary was essentially saying, “Everything will be fine. Simply listen to Jesus and act according to His Word, no matter what it looks like.” You can say that, too.

So the miracle is somewhat more than just “the water now become wine.” Maybe our Lord’s miracle at Cana did not begin at the time when He saw those “six large stone water jars there.” Perhaps the miracle actually began much earlier, when Jesus was invited to the wedding with His disciples and HE ACTUALLY WENT! I am talking about the miracle of God’s presence among us! It’s the unfathomable mystery of Christ our Lord choosing, not only to come to earth, but also to sit among us in our daily lives and to be with us in the midst of our imperfect marriages and other family relationships. Don’t overlook that miracle. John does not write to us about a God who simply drops our provisions down upon us from above! Today’s Gospel shows us a God who desires to live bodily among us, providing for our every need while standing near and in the midst of us!

If you think of our Lord’s first miracle only in terms of “water now become wine,” and nothing more, then you would think of Jesus’ glory as only an isolated display of His divine power. To be sure, Jesus displayed His glory at Cana’s wedding because He possesses the divine power to change water into wine just by speaking a Word.

But Jesus is not all about showing us how He can flex His God-muscles. He is revealing His DESIRE to come to the wedding! He wants to be a part of your life and exert His divine power for your blessing. We hear this Gospel not merely to see a Lord and Christ who can do great things, but here we see a Lord and a Christ who wants to be among us, to be baptized in our filthy, sin-filled water, and He finds no greater glory than providing forgiveness—true purification—for us while He’s right here in our midst! He wants to bring the wine to the party, the best wine at that!, for you to enjoy His wedding feast of salvation. See if you can tell someone what you learned from this well-known story: Today’s miracle begins when Jesus was invited to the wedding with His disciples, and HE ACTUALLY WENT!

Jesus wants to be with us, and even rejoices to be with us, whether we remembered to invite Him or not. Jesus is happy to dwell among us because there is now, thanks to Him alone, nothing in us any longer that would bring down His wrath. After all, when His Hour did come, Jesus our Lord shouldered all the punishment and judgment against us when He entered the Baptismal water for us and thus became “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29).

This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and from that day forward He made His glory plain as day, the glory that means forgiveness for you, exemption from the punishment you had deserved from the Ten Commandments; it means a wedding union to the God who desired to be perfectly one with you. Give heartfelt thanks and praise to God almighty, for when God calls this miracle the first one, He wants you to know and to trust that there are many more to follow, also in your life.

In the Name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.