

Sermon For Sunday January 19 2025: Come and Dine - Epiphany 2

On the third day, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. How many weddings have you been to in your life? Can you remember what all those brides wore, the music that was played, the songs you danced to at the reception? Whether you enjoy weddings or dread them, they make an impression. You can recall details of a wedding many years after they happen. How the light caught her eyes. How the champagne tasted. Who caught the bouquet. It's not just any day. It's a day that strives for goodwill, for abundance and joy. Despite the fact that every wedding is a cliché — how could it be otherwise? — and despite the army of wedding professionals waiting to capitalize on your special day, a wedding remains the basic metaphor we have for things turning out right in the end.

Which is exactly why this wedding, with its water-to-wine miracle, marks the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in the Gospel of John. John is setting the scene for everything that comes after, and telling us what he thinks life as a follower of Jesus is really about. As Marcus Borg writes in his book titled simply *Jesus*, "The story of Jesus is about a wedding. And more: it is a wedding at which the wine never runs out. More: it is a wedding at which the best wine is saved for last."

John is an odd duck. He clearly thinks this is a very important story for understanding who Jesus is, and yet this is a story that occurs only in his Gospel. The other Gospels make no mention of Jesus turning water into wine. Our lectionary runs in a 3-year cycle — one year each for Matthew, Mark, and Luke. John doesn't get a year to himself: instead we get little bits and pieces of John in each of the three years. Where Matthew, Mark, and Luke tell variations of the same basic story about Jesus, John goes off in his own direction. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are more narrative, sticking to the facts of Jesus' life and inserting Jesus' teaching as it was preserved in early manuscripts. John is different: more interpretive and intellectual. John wants to show us not just what Jesus says and does, but what Jesus means. And what Jesus means is life, joy, abundance, and peace. John is convinced that the Christian life is meant to be a comedy, not a tragedy. Despite how dark things might seem out there in the world, despite the fact that the path to life will lead Jesus — and us — through death, despite all of this: things will turn out right in the end. God is in control, leading us to light and life in Jesus.

John drops a hint about the meaning of Jesus in the way he begins the Cana story: "On the third day." Important things happen in the Bible on the third day — most notably Jesus' resurrection. In the same way that the first line of the first chapter of John, "In the beginning was the Word," calls to mind the beginning of everything in the book of Genesis, "on the third day" points to the climax and resolution of Jesus' story. On the third day is life, and that is where we are called to live.

Then John goes on to tell us about a wedding. Marriage as a metaphor for the union of God and humankind runs throughout the Bible. In the passage from Isaiah that we heard today, God is the bridegroom joined in union to God's people Israel:

"You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. 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."

A wedding in the ancient world was an unparalleled feast. Celebrations continued for days on end. For the poor people Jesus grew up among, a wedding meant a pause from seemingly endless labor and a chance to eat and drink abundant food and wine, in stark contrast to the meager rations that made up their typical daily fare. The life that God intends for us is a life where there is enough: an abundance that springs from God's own abundance.

But God intends more for us than mere sustenance. There should be enough wine, and it should be good wine, the finest wine. The marriage supper God invites us to is meant to bring us pleasure and joy. The life God intends for us is one filled with beauty and contentment and all good things. It is a lie to think of pleasure as immoral. As we see at this wedding feast where Jesus reveals himself, the day of banquet and feasting is also the day of reconciliation, joy, and peace. Only when there is enough to go around, plenty to be shared freely, can old resentments be washed away and new companionship begin to grow.

Despite John's tendency to show us the otherworldly, mysterious and ethereal side of Jesus, this miracle makes a strong case that the Christian life is grounded in simple, daily pleasures like good food and wine: following Jesus is more about earth than heaven. God became incarnate not to pull us out of our bodies and into heaven, but rather to bring heaven down to us, to bring the peace and abundance that is God's intention for all people and places into every corner of human life. We are blessed with this feast at the Eucharistic table week-by-week and day-by-day, blessed with enough and more left over to share. And in our joy we are called to go out into God's world and share God's invitation: the table is set for all! Come and dine.