Second Sunday after the Epiphany

**“The Unknown Servants”**

John 2:1-12 / January 16, 2022

 **Introduction**

 I will continue to preach the Genesis sermon series, but depending on the situation, I will also occasionally preach seasonal or general sermons according to the lectionary. Last Sunday I preached the sermon on Genesis, but today I am going to give a general sermon following the lectionary this week because I want to deal with the theme relating the gospel lesson. The Bible passage we read this morning has a special meaning in a sense that it reports the first miracle Jesus performed during his public ministry.

 What a great story it is – Jesus changed water into wine when the wine was gone at a wedding banquet! The banquet might have been spoilt if there were no such miracle. By changing water into wine, Jesus spiced up the party and pleased not only the director of the banquet but also all the guests. This miracle story tells us, in a symbolic meaning, how Jesus can help us when the wine of our life is gone.

 There might be a time when the monotony of life falls upon us, when love cools and our marriage isn’t working well, when our spiritual enthusiasm is on the wane and so on. Yet we can invite Jesus in our midst so that he may rejuvenate our weary bones and tired minds, restore our broken relationships, and revitalize our homes and churches. Yes, Jesus can change water into wine, and restore joy, hope, and love in our hearts and lives. Thus, the first miracle Jesus performed encourages us in various ways.

 **Unknown Servants in the Bible**

 Jesus was the star of the banquet. Yet today I would like us to pay attention to those who played a supporting role – the unknown servants. They were the ones who did all the hard work to prepare for the banquet. But nobody recognized their contribution. They too were at the banquet, but nobody invited them over for dinner. They had no right to enjoy the party – only duty to serve the guests. Nonetheless, they kept serving people, for that was who they were – the servants.

 As she noticed that the wine was gone, Mary, Jesus’ mother, informed Jesus that they had no more wine. We don’t have any clue about why she did that? Did she know that Jesus can, and will, change water into wine? Was she able to predict the future? Did she just want her son to know what was lacking for the banquet? It is hard to answer. But one thing we can say clearly is that she fully trusted Jesus and was ready to do whatever he told her, not just because she was a good mother, but because she “treasured up all the things” shepherds had heard from the angel and said to her about the newborn baby.

 So, she said to the servants who were around her, **“Do whatever he (Jesus) tells you.”** **(vs. 5)** Nearby were six stone water jars used for the Jewish cleansing ritual. Jesus said to the servants, **“Fill the jars with water,”** and they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, **“Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.”** and they did. (vs. 7-8) What a ridiculous situation! What was needed was wine, and yet Jesus was dealing with water. What was he doing? Besides, Jesus was just one of the guests, not the master of the servants. The servants could have ignored Jesus. But they did whatever Jesus commanded them to do. Why were the servants listening to him?

 Further, imagine what the servants might have thought when Jesus told them to do what they could never understand. The servants might have wondered why Jesus commanded them to fill the jars. The water jars Jesus wanted them to fill were for handwashing, and all the guests already got in after washing their hands. They also were not able to understand why Jesus told them to draw water from the jars and take it to the master of the banquet. They might have been afraid of the result of what they were doing. The water they were about to bring to the master might make the master so upset, that he might spill the water to the ground, cuss at them, beat them, and kick them out.

 But they did what Jesus told them to do. Why did the servants obey Jesus? Did they obey Jesus because they were afraid of him, or they were conditioned to accept any orders from any person? Well, we do not know. But one thing important is that as they obeyed Jesus and did what he asked them to do, they became the witnesses of the miracle. They were the only ones who knew the secret of the new wine. It would be happy for us to imagine what happened to them after they witnessed the miracle Jesus performed. They might have become disciples of Jesus and followed him ever since.

 **Unknown Servants in Our Church**

 As I meditated on the unknown servants who were witnesses of miracles in today's text, I thought of other unknown servants serving Bethel and Rehoboth Church. You put a lot of effort into preparing for worship each week, handle various administrative tasks of the church, participate in meetings and gatherings, care for neighbors in need, donate money, and willingly take your time to participate in church events. You don't do it because someone tells you to do it and because someone is afraid. I think that you are ‘the unknown servants and witnesses of miracles’ who are no different from the main characters of today’s text.

 Apostle Paul said that we are **“the servants of Christ and managers of God’s secrets,” and that “what is expected of a manager is that they prove to be faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:1-2)** He is saying that being faithful is the key for becoming a servant of Christ.

 The parable of the bags of gold in Matthew 25 teaches us how to become a faithful servant. A master gave five bags of gold to one servant, two bags to another, and one bag to another, each according to his ability. When the master came back, the first two servants doubled what they were entrusted, and the master paid them a compliment saying, **“Well done, good and faithful servant!” (Matthew 25:21, 23)**

 Here, we need to know that they were good and faithful servants, not because they showed their abilities to double the bags of gold, but because they were able to discern the will of the master, willing and committed to do what their master wanted them to do.

 Think about this: What if the servants had not listened to Jesus? What if they had not filled the jars with water to the brim? What if they had not drawn some water from the jars and taken it to the master of the banquet? Would Jesus still be able to change water into wine without the obedient servants? Yes, of course he could. Yet, Jesus wanted to involve the servants in such wonderful miraculous work. And their hearts and lives must have been changed after they experienced the miracle, as if water was changed into wine.

 Today, Jesus calls us to his ministry of changing water into wine. He wants our home to be recovered so that it may be filled with love and joy. He wants our church to be revitalized, so that we may fervently gather in our worship and fellowship and vigorously scatter to serve our neighbors and spread the good news of Christ to the whole world.

 For this ministry, Jesus wants us to be his servants and obediently follow his way. Jesus is the only one who can change water into wine, and only good and faithful servants can witness the miracle and participate in such holy work of Christ. Are you a good and faithful servant of Christ? I think you are! I believe that the Lord, through you, will turn our water-like situation into a wine-like miracle. I hope you all become witnesses of that miracle.