

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Epiphany 2C
January 16, 2022
John 2:1-11

Wine for the Wedding

This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. (John 2:11 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

Marriage is what brings us together today. No, we don't have a wedding, but we do see our Lord Jesus at one. For it's no small matter that Jesus' first miracle was at a wedding. After all, there is hardly a more joyous moment than a man and a woman being united in holy matrimony. And Jesus was there to bless it with His presence and with His first miracle.

Yet, the joyous occasion was at risk when the wine supply ran low and threatened to run out. And while you may think that's no big deal, it would have been disastrous because it would have brought great shame upon this couple and their parents. The social stigma attached to such a thing would not soon be forgotten. Besides, wine, not water, is the beverage of gladness.

So, when Jesus' mother learns of the situation, she makes it known to her Son, "They have no wine." Such a simple statement, but it's instructive for us. For she makes no demands. She does not tell Jesus what to do or how to do it. She merely presents the situation to Him not knowing what He might do. In this she is a type of the Church in her prayers, so that we might also learn to pray with such calm and such faith, presenting our needs to Christ and leaving the rest to Him.

But why would she even say anything to Jesus? It's likely that Mary had truly pondered the events surrounding Jesus' birth and subsequent life. The angel's announcement, the visits by the shepherds and the Magi, Simeon's prophetic words, and the sight of her twelve-year-old son in the temple in the midst of the teachers had all left an indelible impression on her heart. So she presents the situation to Jesus. Yet, she also trusts that He can and will do something. That's why she told the servants to do whatever Jesus might tell them to do.

And what was Jesus' response? "Woman, what does this have to do with me [and you]? My hour has not yet come." As abrupt and harsh as it sounds to us, it's not. He is showing no disrespect. Indeed, there would come another time that He called her "woman" (John 19:26). When Jesus was dying on the cross for the sins of the world, He looked down and when He saw her, He called her "woman" and committed her to the care of the disciple whom He loved. Thus, His response was not disrespectful, but rather one of great love. He had to be about His Father's business, and that involved doing things at the time appointed by His heavenly Father and not by His earthly mother. Besides, on another occasion, Jesus indicated that His hour was the hour of His death.

The next detail mentioned is that there were six stone water jars that were used by the Jews for ceremonial washing. Indeed, the Jews had developed certain ritualistic laws regarding washing hands, feet, and the pots. And if someone did not adhere to those laws, it was thought of to be a sin. But Jesus was going to use the water of the Law and turn it into a great gift of grace.

When the time was right, when His hour had come, He commanded the servants to fill the jars with water. Not an unusual request in itself. And it certainly didn't seem to have anything to do with the wine shortage. But they followed his instructions and in fact filled the jars to the brim so that nothing more could be added. Then Jesus told them to draw "some" out and take it to the master of the feast. They did. And somewhere in the intervening time, all of the water had become wine. Jesus seemingly hadn't done anything. He had simply commanded the servants to fill the jars with water.

And when the master of the feast tasted the water that had become wine, he couldn't believe his taste buds. This was the best wine, certainly better than the first that had been served. So, he called the groom aside to ask him about the break in custom. Usually, the better wine was served first, and once the guests had drunk, once the taste buds had become somewhat numbed, the lesser wine could be served without causing offense. But in this case, the best wine had been saved for last. Think how bewildered that groom must have been!

John then ends this account of the marriage feast and indicates that this was Jesus' first miracle, His first sign. This is more than a miracle; it's a sign, and it's always good to know how to read a sign to see what it says. So John indicates that there were two important outcomes as a result of this miracle and thus he identifies its real significance and its importance for us. The first outcome is that Jesus had revealed His glory. And lest we think this is just some phrase, we need to look at the verses prior to our text. When Jesus told Nathanael that He had seen him sitting under the fig tree before Philip had called him, Nathanael exclaimed, "You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" Jesus then answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." And since Nathanael was presumably with Jesus at the wedding, he did see something greater. Well over a hundred gallons of water had become wine. Not only was it a large quantity, but the quality was the best. The best had been saved for last. And all by the creative power of the "Son of God, the king of Israel." Nathanael didn't know how true his words were. Jesus really was the Son of God and King of Israel.

And as great as this miracle was, it was a shadow, a sign of something greater to come. When Jesus' hour truly had come, He was crucified for our sins. He submitted to the will of His Father and was nailed to the cross. And when He died, forsaken by His Father, His glory was truly manifested. He had fulfilled the regulations of the Law. As the water in the pots was changed into wine, so Jesus changed the condemnation of the Law into the glory of the Gospel. He turned the water of sadness into wine which gladden men's hearts. And by His death and resurrection, Jesus gladdens the hearts of those who believe in Him alone for their salvation from sin and death.

The second result of this miracle was that the disciples believed in Jesus. Indeed, they already believed since at least two of them had followed Jesus when John the Baptist identified Him as

“the Lamb of God.” In addition, at least two of those disciples had told someone else that the promised Messiah had come. Andrew told his brother Simon and Philip told Nathanael. Also, it often happened that whenever Jesus performed a miracle people came to faith or were strengthened in their faith. The Gospels are full of examples.

Now, we don't often witness miracles as spectacular as that in today's Gospel. But we do witness miracles even more special. When water is poured over a person's head in Baptism, a miracle occurs. The devil is kicked out of that person's heart as his sins are washed away, faith is created, and the Holy Spirit moves in. That person is freed from slavery to Satan and added to God's family. And all this through no merit of his own. It is a blessed gift of God's love.

Or when we partake of the Lord's Supper, we receive the very Body and Blood of Jesus along with the bread and wine. How that happens is a miracle. Yet, because of who Jesus is and what He has done for us, we believe that He is really and truly present in the Sacrament. And because of Jesus, our sins are forgiven and our faith is strengthened. And this is a true miracle. We certainly can't explain what happens or how it happens. All we know is that it does happen and we rejoice in another wonderful gift of God's love.

As Jesus gladdened the hearts of those at the wedding in Cana, so He gladdens the hearts of those who trust in Him alone for their salvation. He gives His blessing to marriage by His presence, even as He is the groom of His Bride, the Church. As He changed the water into wine, so He changed our condemnation into glorification. We have become His children through our Baptism and we continue to receive forgiveness through His Body and Blood of the Sacrament of the Altar. What great gifts He has given to us and for us. Though we may have joy now, and sorrow too, the best wine is yet to come as we join the eternal marriage feast. Let us rejoice in our Savior who makes our hearts glad with the wine of forgiveness and life everlasting. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener