

Pastor Kenneth Mars  
St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY  
Second Sunday after the Epiphany  
January 17, 2010  
Text: John 2:1–11

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

According to the gospel reading for today from John 2:1–11, the first miracle that Jesus performed was the changing of water into wine. Now at first reading, one might wonder why water into wine? As far as miracles go, this isn't nearly as impressive as raising the dead, healing the sick, or casting out demons. Those kinds of miracles have life and death implications. Changing water into wine so that wedding guest can continue their celebration doesn't seem quite so life-shattering. But John concludes that this miraculous sign "manifested (Christ's) glory. And his disciples believed in him" (vs. 11). So, this not-so-impressive miracle is life-changing after all.

But John doesn't really call this a miracle. He says that this is the "first of (Jesus') signs." In John's gospel, signs are real-life events that teach you something about Jesus that you wouldn't know otherwise. These signs point not so much to what Jesus does but to who He is. All the "signs" in John's Gospel reveal to us that Jesus is the Son of God who comes to save His people from sin, death, and spiritual oppression. But you wouldn't know that about Jesus without the signs. Our Lord looked rather ordinary and common, like any other first century Jewish man. He performs sacramental signs to show us what John says in John 1:14, "And the Word (that was in the beginning with God and was God) became flesh and dwelt among us."

John begins unraveling this "first sign" by saying that "on the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there" (vs. 1). The reference to the third day can mean at least three things: the third day of the week – Tuesday, or maybe the third day since Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist described in John 1:29-34, or possibly the third day of the wedding celebration. You see, weddings in those days lasted up to a whole week and everyone in the town was invited.

John, like no other New Testament author, writes in layered messages. A surface reading of John's gospel is just that, superficial and thin, lacking John's intended depth. When we hear the phrase "on the third day" what immediately comes to mind? You got it – the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. This first of Jesus' signs happened in real time and space, either referring to the third day after His baptism, or the third day of the week, or the third day of the wedding. But John is also cluing us in to the greatest of all signs: Jesus' death and resurrection from the dead on the third day.

In case you might think this is stretching the biblical text a bit, Jesus' own words direct us to the "hour" of His death and crucifixion in vs. 4. But let's not get ahead of John just yet.

Mary, Jesus' mother, Jesus, and His disciples are at a wedding in Cana. As I mentioned, New Testament weddings lasted up to 7 days. In those days, the groom was expected to shoulder the expense of the entire wedding with its week long feasting and celebration. To run out of food or wine was a social disaster of unimaginable consequences. It would be life-long stigma, "You weren't prepared for your wedding, the most important day of your life. You ran out of wine!"

Mary sees what's about to happen and goes to Jesus. "They have no wine," says Mary in vs. 3. Jesus seems rather annoyed by her statement, "Woman, what does this have to do with Me?" (vs. 4). In other words, I'm not here to fix every little problem that comes along. It's here that Jesus provides the verbal link to His death and crucifixion, mentioned earlier. He says, "Woman, what does this have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come."

The "hour" that Jesus is referring to is His death and resurrection. In John chapter 17, Jesus' prays these marvelous words, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you" (John 17:1). Not long after praying those words, Jesus is arrested, John 18, and His hour begins. The wedding at Cana is not the hour for Jesus' glorification. The cross and empty tomb are Christ's glory.

But somehow, Mary knows that Jesus will do something about this small problem of running out of wine. She turns to the servants and says to them to "do whatever he tells you" (vs. 5). Those are Mary's last words recorded in Holy Scripture. That's intentional. Whatever her Son says is what His people should do no matter how strange it may seem. Do whatever He tells you. Mary's command continues to resonate 20 centuries later in Kimball, NE/Burns, WY. We're here to do what Jesus says, to believe what Jesus says we are to believe, to hope in what Jesus says we are to hope in: forgiveness, life, salvation, joy unto salvation, and peace beyond understanding now and into eternity.

Well, six stones jars used for the "Jewish purification rites" are shown to Jesus (vs. 6). The water was either used by the guests to wash their hands or possibly for the bride's ceremonial washing leading up to her wedding night. Either way, John is once again showing us something written on different layers. The Old Testament law required various washing but they never did the job perfectly. You always got dirty again, needing to be ceremonially washed another time.

The Old Testament, with its imperfect system of elaborate washings, ceremonies, fastings, worship festivals, is now filled-up completely with the new wine of Jesus. His New Testament wine is better and greater than the Old Testament wine. In case we

missed it, John lets us know that his intended message is that Jesus and His saving ministry is greater than the Old Testament.

We learn this from the master of the feast. After tasting Jesus' wine, he says, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now" (vs. 10). Jesus gives the good wine. It's better than the wine given by Moses on Mount Sinai, better than the prophetic wine provided by the prophets of old including John the Baptist.

Calvary's wine is God's best. The good wine of the Law gives way to the best wine of the Gospel. Obedience to the letter of the Law is replaced with the joy of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of Jesus. Moses, the patriarchs of old, the ancient prophets, the Ten Commandments and all the do's and don'ts of the Law, bow before the King of Kings and the Lord of glory. Judgment is replaced with mercy. Works of self-righteousness are taken over by Christ's holiness given to us freely by grace through faith. Our death is swallowed up by Christ's death. His perfect life is given in exchange for our imperfect life. The best wine of Jesus' salvation freely flows to everyone who thirsts for it.

Without Christ's best wine, religion becomes a joyless, perfunctory set of rules and regulations void of any true joy, peace and fulfillment. Without Christ, worship is another vain attempt to find God and shape Him into an idol of our own imagination. If you are tired of life-less, dull, and tiresome attempts at spirituality then come and drink the best that God has to offer: the wine that flows from the pierced side and wounded hands and feet of Jesus. God's best is found in Jesus and in what He has to offer through sacramental signs of forgiveness, life and salvation that flow from His holy Word, Baptism, liberating absolution and joyful meal of Christ's body and blood. These are God's very best. They are present tense, real-life sacramental signs, and visible manifestations of that which is otherwise invisible and unknown. Joy and abounding peace are found in these signs. In them, you rejoice in the best of heaven and in turn God Himself rejoices over you (Isaiah 62:5).

A not-so impressive miracle turns out to be one of the most impressive after all. Jesus has manifested His glory so that you too can believe in Him. Seeing the signs of Jesus' glory, may you too "believe in Him" (vs. 11).

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

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.