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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Second Sunday after the Epiphany (Series C)

January 17, 2016

Text: John 2:1–11

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

To us moderns, today's gospel reading from John 2 is a perplexing passage of Scripture. Some think the Lord changing water into wine to be either silly or scandalous. One commentator flatly declared Jesus never changed water into wine; it's pure myth. The Lord of glory would never bother Himself with such trifles as wine at a wedding; it's beneath His dignity as the Son of God. Other commentators have tried to protect the Lord's moral integrity by stating that although Jesus changed water into wine, He did so as to call the wedding crowd to moderation rather than drunkenness and excess. It's almost as if Jesus were the stereotypical Puritan, suspicious of any kind of earthly pleasure and severe upon anyone who might be actually having a good time. Let me be clear...neither of these extremes is remotely accurate.

But this gospel reading is curious to us. How can this first of Jesus' signs (vs. 10), changing water into wine, manifest the Lord's glory so that His disciples believed in him (vs. 11)? How can the important, but relatively common, occasion of a wedding be the venue for Jesus' first miraculous sign? Casting out demons, preaching powerfully in the synagogues, raising the dead, healing the sick and the oppressed, driving out greedy moneychangers, debating the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees...those are the kinds of things one would expect to manifest the Son of God's glory. Wine at a wedding...not so much.

This first of Jesus' signs – the wedding of Cana of Galilee – is not only first in the chronological order of things, but it's first in that it sets the parameters for the Lord's earthly ministry. To use more modern terminology, this first miracle is programmatic. It sets the boundaries and goal for Jesus' ministry. That's why John wrote the disciples saw His glory and believed Him to be the Son of God the Father Almighty. Through this first sign, Jesus revealed Himself to be the long-awaited Savior who takes away the sin and shame of the world through His life, death, and resurrection.

The connection to Jesus' death and resurrection begins in vs. 1, "On the third day there was a wedding at Cana of Galilee..." The "third day" is more than simply a time signature, though it is that too. We must remember that John wrote His gospel for Christians who already knew and believed in Jesus' death and resurrection. John gives his own purpose statement in John 20:30–31. "Now Jesus did many other signs ... but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing (notice the on-going present tense) you may have life in his name."

The Christians hearing John's gospel being read in the Sunday divine service are already baptized in Jesus' saving name. They already know that Jesus died on the cross and rose from the dead "on the third day." We cannot under any circumstances hear that phrase and not think of Good Friday and especially Easter.

This first, miraculous sign in Cana of Galilee which occurred "on the third day" is directly and purposefully connected to the Lord's greatest of all signs: His death and resurrection. In John's Gospel, the Lord describes the cross and resurrection as the manifestation of His glory (cp Jn 12:16, 23).

On a more literal level, the third day refers to the time since Jesus called Nathanael to be a disciple (Jn 1:43). The day before that, two of John the Baptist's disciples began following Jesus (Jn 1:35). The day before that, Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist and declared to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The Holy Spirit descended upon the Lord in the form of a dove (Jn 1:29). So, when you put all the time references together, the miracle of Cana in Galilee happens on the sixth day since Jesus' baptism.

This too connects the miracle of Cana of Galilee to Good Friday. For it was on Friday, the sixth day of the week, that Jesus was crucified for the sins of the world. On the sixth day of Holy Week, Jesus does exactly what John the Baptist said of Jesus. He presents Himself as the Lamb of God to be sacrificed on a Roman cross so that all of our sins can be forgiven, never to be remembered again, never to be held against us in God's sight.

But what of the miracle itself...the changing of water into wine? The Lord Jesus and His disciples are invited to a wedding feast in Cana of Galilee. In those days, wedding feasts lasted for an entire week with food and drink offered to all every day. Mary, the mother of our Lord, comes to Jesus with a problem. "They have no wine" (vs. 3), a social faux pas in those days. Jesus' response is somewhat enigmatic, "Woman, what

does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come” (vs. 4). Though not rude, the response is a bit formal for a son addressing his mother. Already Jesus is beginning to separate Himself for the purpose of fulfilling His divine mission. He came to save the world from sin, death, and Satan. That is the hour Jesus is referring to: His crucifixion. It’s as if Jesus were saying, “Woman, the hour of fulfilling My baptismal identify of taking away the sins of the world is not yet.”

Mary knows that this Son of hers is also the Word of God made flesh. He will take action. The last words we hear from Mary are most important. Speaking to the servants of the wedding feast she says, “Do whatever he tells you” (vs. 5). That is the voice of Christ’s Church. We do whatever Christ tells us. When Jesus says, “pray” we pray. When Jesus says “be baptized in His name”, we get baptized. When Jesus says, “Eat my body and drink my blood often for the forgiveness of sins”, we do it. When Jesus says, “Abide in me as branches abide in a vine” we abide in Him through faith and obedience. On it goes. Whatever Jesus says is what goes. For it will be for our present and eternal good.

Which leads us to the miracle. Six stone jars were there at the feast “for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20 to 30 gallons” (vs. 6). Jesus commands the servants, “Fill the jars with water” (vs. 7). The servants heeded Mary’s admonition and did what Jesus said to do. Our Lord’s next command is “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast” (vs. 8). In faithful obedience, the servants draw out the water now wine and give it to the master of the feast. Upon tasting the wine, the master is flabbergasted. He seeks out the groom with puzzled joy, “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).

It’s at this point that the disciples understood, believed, and beheld our Lord’s glory. By the grace of God the Father, they understood what this water to wine referred to: Jesus received John’s water baptism that designated Him to be the Lamb of God who takes away the world’s sins. The water becomes wine signifying that Jesus will shed His cleansing blood on Calvary to purify the universe of sin. The best comes last!!

From the water of John’s baptism to blood given for the enjoyment and salvation of the world on Good Friday’s Mt. Calvary. That’s the glory of God in Christ revealed in the wedding at Cana of Galilee. And we mustn’t overlook the fact that his water now wine miracle happens at a wedding. The OT is rich in messianic imagery describing the salvation of God’s people as a wedding between God and His redeemed people,

including a joyous wedding feast filled with the best of food and wine. All one need do is read today's OT reading from Isaiah 62, or Ezekiel 16 & 23, Hosea 2, or Isaiah 25. It's not without reason that the apostle Paul, in Eph. 5, describes the NT Church as the Bride of Christ who has been cleansed by Christ the bridegroom from every spot and wrinkle through the washing of the word.

And yet there is one more reason the disciples saw and believed. Jesus' command was to fill-up completely the stone jars used for Jewish rites of purification. In this act of filling up the jars and by changing the waters of purification into wine, Jesus is declaring that all of the OT is now fulfilled in His sacrificial blood. The best of God's gifts are saved for the last! This water turned into wine not only purifies and saves the sinner; it fulfills all the demands and promises of Holy Scripture. We are truly set free in Christ Jesus. Martin Luther had this to say about Christ's miracle,

“For when the heart hears that Christ fulfills the Law for us and takes our sin upon himself, it no longer cares that impossible things are demanded by the Law... This is because the heart now has in Christ all that the Law demands... The Law is delightful now and easy which before was disagreeable, difficult and impossible; for it lives in the heart of the Spirit” (cited in Weinrich p. 318-319).

Through the Lord Jesus Christ, we baptized believers are cleansed of all sins, filled with His Holy Spirit, and made heirs of His eternal kingdom. The promised joy of Christ's kingdom is poured into our hearts and minds. And we are united to Christ in marital joy and peace. Water turned to wine at a wedding points us to Jesus in the glory of His death and resurrection. Through God's grace, we too, hear and believe, and behold Christ's glory as our Savior. Rejoice and be glad, O beloved of the Lord.

✠ 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.