

January 20, 2013

Epiphany 2

Text: John 2:1-11

Theme: "Everything is New"

Nothing Jesus does is coincidence or on accident. Many preachers, preaching for weddings over the years, have used this account of the wedding in Cana. They have lauded the way Jesus thought so much of weddings that he would not let the wine run out. Or they preach as though this is a text about how Jesus so loved people that he would go against his conscience rather than let Ashnab and Salome run out of wine and be embarrassed. The truth is, this text has very little to do with weddings. Nor did Jesus just stumble into the situation and shake a miracle out of his sleeve because he got cornered by his mom.

Read the Old Testament and see how many times God uses marriage as a metaphor for his relationship to us. We are his bride and he is our bridegroom. In fact, there is no closer relationship on earth than the husband/wife relationship. The closest we will ever get, at least in this life, to understanding our relationship with God is to understand our own marriage. And I mean both the good and the bad in earthly marriage. The

best way to understand how sin hurts God is to understand how we feel when our spouse hurts us. And the best way we can understand how God forgives us is when we learn to forgive our spouse and ourselves within the context of marriage – see the book of Hosea for further instruction on forgiveness in marriage, but for now, listen to Isaiah.

***For as a young man marries a young woman,
so shall your sons marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.***

So, Jesus went to a wedding intentionally to teach us something about his relationship to us. What were we supposed to learn, besides the fact that Jesus can make really good wine and even Jesus caves in when his mom nags him?

First, it was the 3rd day when the wedding took place. Does that ring any bells for anyone? I don't think John recorded that it was the 3rd day just because he wanted to be precise in his reporting. In fact, John is the evangelist who is least concerned about being precise. He is concerned with themes and ideas. It is Mark who has the hang up with being

accurate. Of course the miracle happened on the 3rd day because this wedding is to be a sign - a sign of the relationship that is being established on the third day after Jesus was crucified. That's when Jesus fulfilled his marriage vows to you – you will be my people and I will be your God.

Now a sign for a Christian is not anything magical or mystical. We do not believe in seeing the future or luck or chance. That's the way many people speak of signs. We have confidence only in the will of God. A sign for us is something God uses to remind us of His will for us. These are truths that are really bigger than the human language we have to use to describe them. It is almost impossible for us to understand how God feels about us, but he uses a wedding in Cana to give us a picture to see and experience.

Remember that feeling we got in the pit of our stomachs when we fell hopelessly in love. Everyone who has fallen in love knows how wonderful and how terrible it is all at the same time. And it is a beautiful thing when that feeling is brought to fulfillment in marriage. It does not work out that way all the time because of human sinfulness and a broken world, but

when it does, marriage is the completion of that love into which we fell. The best way we can begin to understand God's love for us is by examining our deepest love for one another. Really, that is our only reference point.

So, Jesus is at the wedding in Cana and the wedding reception is going full force and they run out of wine. Remember that wedding parties lasted for days in Jesus' time. And remember that wine, for the Hebrews, is the elixir of life. Wine is not "just something to drink." Rather, wine is representative of everything good and beautiful in the world and the better the wine the better the representation. So if the wedding is our relationship with God and the wine runs out, this is a very bad thing. Not to worry because Mother Mary knows what to do. She knows, at least somewhere deep within her soul, that it is Jesus who keeps the wine flowing in our marriage to God and so she goes to him at once. Now does she really understand all of the symbolism here? No, probably not. But her faith understands that Jesus is the source of something powerful and important. Exactly what he was would not become completely clear to her until after the resurrection, but

she knew that he can fix huge problems and this was a huge problem.

He worked her faith a little. He reminded her that it was he who was steering this ship and not her, but in the end, she gave him the faithful answer. "Do whatever he tells you." Now that is the perfect final answer to everything. If we could get to that answer more quickly, our lives would be simpler and more joyful. Do whatever he tells you! Mary gives us the answer to the mystery of life right here. Just do whatever Jesus says and stop questioning, stop arguing and stop trying to do it yourself.

There were six stone jugs. They were used for the Jewish rite of purification. But you can perform all the rites you want. The Law cannot purify us. The Law can only accuse us. The water was symbolic of washing away your sin but that water could not address the cause of the sin, so no matter how much you washed, the real problem was never fixed. No matter how well you use the water, it was still only water and water is not Jesus' wine. You can follow the rules. You can live an outwardly righteous life. You can even judge everyone who

fails to live up to your standards. You can condemn everyone who is off track and guess what? You're still drinking nothing but water because the sweet wine of the Gospel only comes from Jesus.

So then he did it. He took the watery Law and he fulfilled it. He kept it perfectly and he created wine like no one had ever tasted. He created Gospel. Everything is new now! The old has passed away. The law is fulfilled and the wine of the Gospel flows through us. You and I don't have to hold onto old grudges, bad memories, righteous or unrighteous anger – why would we drink old stale water that's been sitting around in the heat of the sun in stone jugs when we could drink the cool, sweet wine of the Gospel. We can forgive. We can make Godly choices. We can bathe in Baptismal waters and freely consume the body and blood of Christ and in so doing we can grow ever closer and stronger in our relationship with God until the great and glorious day when we get to meet our bridegroom face to face.