

January 20, 2019 Second Sunday after Epiphany

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Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas

GOSPEL

John 2:1-11

The holy gospel according to Saint John, the second chapter.

Glory to you, O Lord.

¹On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. ⁹When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

The gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ.

So, I don't know if you noticed...and I don't want to freak you out...but we've travelled to a bit of a parallel dimension today – in terms of the church's cycle of Scripture readings.

Our three-year lectionary rotates through the three gospel accounts from Matthew, Mark, and Luke...which all have many elements in common...even as they focus on different themes. But John is quite a different telling of the story of Jesus...and it gets woven into all three of the years of the cycle. It's kind of like Brigadoon, that way...

Today, we've been transported from Luke's gospel to John's. We left Luke's account of Jesus' Baptism...and now we are at the opening salvos of Jesus' ministry – as John tells it.

In John, Jesus' ministry begins with a grand sign...one of seven, by most counts. Signs are not just your ordinary everyday miracles. They are what their name says they are. They point to something...direct us somewhere. So, when John tells us that the changing of water to wine at the wedding at Cana is a sign...he's not just saying it was amazing. He's

saying that it is the first sign pointing us to where Jesus is going. It is the first sign that shows us his true purpose and identity.

It's a pretty mysterious sign, too, if I do say so myself. I wouldn't hire John to make road signs...They might look more like riddles than directions. They would not do anything to improve Austin traffic.

This is a mysterious kind of sign. There are at least as many things that we don't know as things we do. Whose wedding is it? Why does Jesus seem to need to be prodded by his mother to act? How did it happen that they ran out of wine on such an important occasion?

To be fair – that wouldn't only be on the couple's family, providing food for the celebration...but probably also on the guests...because often guests brought food and drink to contribute to celebrations in that time. So both the family and the community may have somehow failed to offer the kind of support and love that was expected on such a special occasion. This moment of scarcity is a scandal and an embarrassment on so many levels at once.

We can imagine all kinds of answers to the questions the story raises...but there *are* a few things we know...a few clues as to what this sign might really mean about who Jesus is and why he has come.

Perhaps the most obvious is that the people don't have enough...and Jesus provides not only enough...but an abundance...and not just for everyday life...but for joyful celebration.

Entertainingly...the steward in this story becomes confused when the best wine has been saved until late in the celebration...when it won't be appreciated nearly as much. Jesus didn't have to make wine that good...nobody would have known the difference...but Jesus offers the best there is...

I was thinking about this part of the story a lot this week...because it reminded me of a sort of embarrassing story from when I was in college. You see...during my junior year, I got really sick. I don't remember how long I stayed in bed without moving. I couldn't swallow. I ended up in the ER from dehydration. At some point during all this...a friend of mine came by to see me. He was worried. He had heard that I was sick and hadn't seen me for days. He stopped by my room with this particular kind of juice I really liked. Or so he tells me. I don't remember it. At all. He does. Because, apparently, I was not appreciative of the effort he'd made to remember my favorite juice and bring it to me. I don't know what I said. I may have still been delirious. He had gone to great lengths to bring me something I did not...and wasn't even able to...appreciate.

And, unlike my friend, who didn't fully know what he was getting into...Jesus offers us immeasurable goodness and abundance...even though he knows in advance we can't possibly appreciate it fully. And that doesn't stop him. He just loves us. He wants to shower us with goodness, and celebration.

He is beginning to create a new way – where there is always enough...and more than enough...of the best of what we need.

And there is one final thing I want to point out, that this sign shows us. If we walk through the landscape slowly, we can remember who gets to see Jesus for who he really is. Because when the wine runs out...Jesus' mother comes to tell him...and Jesus doesn't gather up the disciples to tell them what he's going to do. He doesn't pull the couple or their parents aside to witness his work. He turns to the servants at the wedding...who might be confused at that moment. After all, a wedding guest has just pulled them all aside from worrying about the wine and told them to follow her son's instructions...and Jesus tells them to fill the water jars...and then take a dipper to the chief steward. They are the only ones who see the sign firsthand. Jesus doesn't do it himself. He gathers the least important people and enlists them in an act of divine creativity.

And when the steward pulls in the groom to ask for an explanation...everyone in the room must have been completely confused...except Jesus...and his mother...and the servants. Maybe they all winked at each other while everyone else tried to sort it out.

Now, John tells us that after this, the disciples came to believe in him...but I wonder about those servants. Because they saw it all with their own eyes. Drew the wine out of the water jars with their own hands. They probably didn't see it coming...but they sure saw it when it happened.

Jesus has come to this world to fulfill a purpose...to draw all things to himself...to offer abundant life...and this is the beginning of the signs that will show us what this means for us and the world. Jesus is here to meet our needs...to offer goodness beyond our ability to even understand, more or less appreciate...and he is going to work alongside the least regarded...and make them a part of the work of building a new creation.

Whose wedding was it? Who were these guests? These servants? Well...we don't know. I guess they may as well be you...they may as well be me...perhaps there is someone out there we would otherwise ignore...but who is about to bring us a sip of something sweeter than we ever imagined we could taste.

If John is a sort of parallel universe, maybe it is one that we have one foot in all the time...and don't always notice. Because the kingdom is always a little closer than we think. Just a sip, a dance, a celebration away.

What is ordinary becomes extraordinary. Before your very eyes.

Taste and see...abundant life has arrived in our midst. Christ has come to the party. And it doesn't look like he plans on going home anytime soon.

Thank be to God. Amen.