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Zion Lutheran Church, Youngstown, Ohio

Weekend of Sunday, January 16, 2022
2nd Sunday after Epiphany/Lectionary 2/Year C

First Reading: Isaiah 62:1-5

Second Reading: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Gospel Reading: John 2:1-11

Sermon Title: “The Best Wine”

Theme

Turning water to wine at the wedding at Cana is described as the first of Jesus’ signs. Through many such epiphanies, Jesus reveals that he bears God’s creative power and joyful presence into the world.

Text

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.

Sermon

During the Season of Epiphany, the readings, especially the Gospel Readings, are meant to be epiphanies, revelations of God's glory through Jesus Christ as he began his public ministry.

Let's look at the activity of Jesus and see what we can learn.

We are in John chapter 2 today, and according to John, the only thing that has happened so far is that,

- John the Apostle established Jesus as "the Word," who came from "in the beginning". We discussed this on the weekend of January 2.
- About the same time, John the Baptizer began his ministry of baptism for the preparation of the coming of God's Messiah. We discussed that on the weekend of January 9.
- Jesus was baptized along with many others;
- It was revealed to John the Baptizer and he proclaimed it to the world that Jesus is "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!";
- And Jesus began calling disciples.

John the Apostle even provided us with a timeline.

- From the day of Jesus' baptism;
- He being outed as the Lamb of God;
- his calling five or six disciples;
- to his arrival at the wedding in Cana, was only three days.

Now we might wonder why a community wedding feast is the setting for Jesus' inaugural outing. I think the answer can be found back in Genesis where we read that God's design and structure for the world is community and feasting is what God wants us to be doing.

I suppose God could have chosen a more auspicious outing like the Jerusalem Temple at Passover – God will use that venue at the end of Jesus' public ministry, but at this point, God chose a community wedding feast.

Weddings in first-century Palestine were community events and Cana was a small town. So small that it did not survive.

I tell people that I am from Ft. Wayne, but that is because if I said I was from Ossian, no one would know where that is. And I wasn't really from Ossian either. That was just the village closest to us so it became the rural route address we used. My father was one of four boys born to second-generation German immigrants and my mother was one of six children born to second-generation German immigrants. Farming was eventually the vocation my ancestors chose.

In the community of farms where I grew up near Ossian, there was a barn converted to a dance hall called the Hayloft, and that is where all the community wedding feast were held. Although I was just a young child, I have many fond memories of partying with my cousins and neighbors there. It was a simpler time back then, we children were pretty much unsupervised as our parents square-danced the night away, their joy made fuller by beer. And those German Indiana dirt farmers could drink a lot of beer.

I don't know much about wine. Wine will never be my vice, but the Mahoning Valley was built by an immigrant population and some of those ancestral nationalities brought a love for wine with them. In an age when there was little understanding of water sanitation, wine was safer to drink, and most of the time it makes us happier – am I right about this, you wine drinkers?

Well, it is into a similar scenario that we find Jesus today. He took some steps to begin his public ministry. He called a few disciples. We don't know why he ended up at a community wedding feast. Was it a relative of his? A neighbor? It seems those details are not important.

The party must have been going well because the partyers drank all the wine. I should tell you here that first-century community wedding feasts could and would last for days. I should also tell you that for the wine to run out would be a major embarrassment for the families of the newlyweds. It might even have been the reason Mary, Jesus' mother got involved. Who is to say? Did Mary know what she was doing in asking her son to handle the situation? Did she remember the visit of the angel Gabriel, the visit of the Maji? As that lovely song states, "Mary, did you know?" I don't know. All I know is that scripture gives us no record of him doing

anything like this before this point that would have led Mary to the conclusion that this was a problem he could fix, or should fix.

I will tell you what I believe is going on here. I believe that God used Mary to provoke a situation that God used to reveal God's own glory through God's Son, Jesus, God's Messiah – a moment of epiphany, in other words.

In Revelation, John the author, maybe the same author as the Gospel for today, was given a vision in which the Lamb, an image of God's Son, Jesus Christ is being prepared to receive his Bride, the community of the church – you and me, in other words. So maybe a community wedding feast is the best outing to begin his public ministry because it might well be the way our relationship with him is accomplished too.

In the Gospel Reading, the wine ran out. We know how we are, as soon as that word would have gotten out, the party would have ended – am I right? We could ask ourselves or God, "Hey God, why did you let the wine run out?" For Mary, the mother of Jesus, this situation, the ending of the community wedding feast was just untenable. She got Jesus involved. Did she *know* about Jesus' supernatural powers? Or was she used by God? I do not know, but I have often noticed that God uses us in powerful ways, and we don't see it until the deed is done, and we sit back and reflect and maybe say to ourselves, "Wow! How did that happen?"

Like a good son, Jesus eventually acquiesced to his mother's provocations. Let's not presume that Jesus was reluctant or needed to be forced to do a good deed. Perhaps it was all a part of the buildup of the drama.

Jesus' response was to turn water into wine and notice that he did *not* do it in a secretive way. Others were involved. Undoubtedly, they noticed that something supernatural had taken place. The wine steward certainly noticed.

We theologians define signs and miracles differently. Miracles in the Bible are used to provide some greater good, (i.e., healing, raising from the dead, etc.). Signs are just that, indications that God is at work – an epiphany, in other words.

Here in this story, it would *not* have been the end of the world if the party ended. Who knows, maybe the partyers had already been at it for a week. Maybe they

needed to go home and dry out their livers! That misses the point. The point is, that when Jesus Christ is invited to the community wedding feast (metaphorically speaking) the celebration never ends, and no expense is spared, the best wine is served.

This Gospel story isn't really about a first-century community wedding feast at all, is it? It was a moment of epiphany for those in attendance at that Cana community wedding feast, *and* for those of us reading about it today, who have faith and hope that Jesus Christ will host that community wedding feast which has no end at the end of the age. John concluded,

¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and *revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*

As much fun as those community wedding feasts were when I was a little kid, or the more recent ones I have been to, just imagine what a celebration it will be when we can toast God revealed in Jesus Christ for his final victory over sin and death!

Raisin' the Bar Challenge

During the Season of Epiphany, the readings, especially the Gospel Readings, are meant to be epiphanies, revelations of God's glory through Jesus Christ as he began his public ministry.

This week it was revealed that God desires a great marriage between God's Son Jesus Christ and God's creation, and like most marriages, it began with a great community wedding feast, celebrating the joy of the two becoming one. Wine is used as a metaphor for that marriage and what it foretells is that life in Christ is intended to be joyful and unending, with the best in abundance. *Through many such epiphanies, Jesus revealed that he bears God's creative power and joyful presence in the world.*

Now, I hope you noticed that I used the past tense to describe this great marriage between Christ and his church. It has happened! We are living in it presently! The question that we are left to ask ourselves is, am I living a life that is "joyful and unending, with the best in abundance"? If not, why not? The answer may take

some real introspection, but it may lead you to a happier life. Jesus said, "I came that [you] may have life, and have it abundantly. The feast has begun!"

Prayer

Lord God, source of every blessing, you showed forth your glory and led many to faith by the works of your Son, who brought gladness and salvation to his people. Transform us by the Spirit of his love, that we may find our life together in him, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen