

Sermon for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C, 14.i.2007  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of Saint James the Apostle / Brogue, Pennsylvania  
10:00 a.m., Holy Eucharist, LBW/ Setting 2  
Isaiah 62:1-5, Psalm 36:5-10, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, John 2:1-11



Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was  
and Who is to come. ✠ Amen.

Now on the third day there was a wedding in Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and His disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "they have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you . . ."

-- John 2:1-5

☪☪☪ Oral presentation of today's sermon begins on page 7. ☪☪☪

\*[The very last verse of the Fourth Canonical Gospel, the Gospel according to Saint John, reads as follows:

\*[But there are also many other things that Jesus did, if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

-- John 21:25]

\*[If there were *so many* things that Jesus did, then why

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\*Bracketed material not included in oral presentation.

does the community of Saint John list the miracle of wine performed at the wedding in the nearby village of Cana as "the first of His signs"? Obviously, it may have been because the community of the Beloved Disciple thought it *was* the first, chronologically. If so, it is strange not to find this miracle mentioned at all in any of the Synoptic Gospels. Of course, they may have known it as the first of Jesus' wonders, but dropped it from their narrative because Our Lord Himself says it was not yet time for His power to be made manifest.]

\*[Yet, In John, that manifestation of Jesus' power to renew what has dried up and to continue the joy of an anonymous couple's wedding feast *is* remembered, and in some detail. It is remembered in such a way, it seems

to me, reading and pondering and preaching this text some 2,000 years after it was written and copied and sent from congregation to congregation in the Early Church, praying it also at each Service of Christian Marriage, as that sign of Jesus which it is important for us to hear *first*, before we hear about any of the other miracles of God's power and mercy.]

\*[Let us think of the wedding at Cana, with John and his community of believers, as 'the first of His signs,' as that miracle *first in significance* for us. What is that miracle? In a little village a couple celebrates their new life together and Israel, represented by Synagogue congregation, by family and friends from Cana and from Nazareth and perhaps from elsewhere, gives thanks to the Living God for the hope that that marriage represents, for

the hope of children, for the hope of heirs to inherit the promise of God's covenant in the generations to come. Such celebration calls for a feast. A marriage feast, which might begin with a 'rehearsal dinner,' continue with the main meal, music and dancing after the vows are said and witnessed and then continue with breakfasts, luncheons and dinners for a day or two afterward is supposed to express the community's joy and hope. A Jewish wedding was and is inconceivable without a wedding feast.]

\*[Even in the darkest days of the Holocaust, in those few cases in which a couple dared to marry in one of the annihilation camps, a wedding feast of some sort was arranged from whatever crusts of bread or other bits of food the other inmates could offer, always denying themselves for the sake of the couple and for the sake of the hope their

vows represented in a place designed to kill all hope. It is the custom for the mother of a Jewish bride to collect recipes for her daughter from her closest women family and friends and to put these all together in a book to be presented on the daughter's wedding day. Just a couple of years ago the post office--of Canada, I believe—delivered such a collection of recipes to a woman, now a grandmother and hardly a bride, a woman whose own mother was long dead. It had been posted from a displaced persons' camp in Poland in 1945. The pages were on various scraps of paper, with recipes written in a variety of hands and languages. There was a letter from her mother, written in German and very poor English, to her daughter who had been sent from Europe to Canada for her safety just before the rest of the family was deported to a ghetto,

and then to the camps. Her mother wanted her to know that this was her wedding gift to her daughter, in the hope, in the *certainty* that she would marry and raise a fine family. The daughter, reading the letter and its enclosures through her tears noticed in the recipes the recipes she could decipher that, for some of the cake recipes, sugar and honey and other sweeteners and spices had been written down, but that the main ingredients had been left out, so great was the excitement and the hunger of those who wrote about food about which they could only dream.]

\*[The marriage feast at Cana may have begun while Jesus and His Disciples were still with John the Baptist in Judæa. Now, "on the third day" (2:1) they are back home in Galilee attending a wedding with "the mother of Jesus" (v. 3), i.e., Mary of Nazareth. It was a good

reason to come home. John says that it happened 'on the third day.' I count at least four days, reading from John 1:19 to 2:1, but John insists that it was on the *third* day. It will be on this 'third day' that Jesus' divine power and mercy will be revealed in a hidden way, just as it will be made fully manifest on the 'third day' of the Resurrection. It seems plausible to suppose that that is why John calls the day of the miracle at Cana the 'third day.' ]

Reluctantly, in an instance that seems to make no particular sense to even Him, Jesus transforms water that had been set aside at the Synagogue for the ritual bath of purification into wine for the wedding. He does this at His mother's bidding, and He does this not directly but by ordering servants at the feast to fill wine jars with water from the purification jars. That is, His mother is concerned

about the wedding feast and the problem that has arisen. She asks her Son to solve the problem, and commands the servants to do as He directs. He does command, and they obey and, lo, there is more wine for the wedding feast. But, this is a hidden sign. Even the caterer, the wine steward, does not know where the new supply comes from, but only that it is a *very* good vintage.

What was John's context and probable intent in making this story so important, the 'first' of Jesus' signs? Exegetes think that John's Jewish community of believers was experiencing bitter rejection from the majority of Jews, from the synagogue congregations to which they belonged. It was no longer easy for the Christians of John's community to believe in Jesus as God's Anointed, as the fulfillment of God's promises. In fact, it was bitterly

difficult. Their faith in Jesus was separating them from family, from friends and from the community to which they had always belonged. To put it another way, 'the party was over.' Yet, if Jesus was the Christ, then there was, there *is* reason for joy and for hope—*the party had just begun*. Just as Jesus heard the pleading of His Blessed Mother and secretly renewed the joy of that wedding feast so long ago, so, too, He *now* hears the prayer of His Bride, Our Mother, the Church, and He is even now renewing our joy and hope by His Holy Spirit. He is giving us new life by washing us in the purifying waters of Holy Baptism. He is feeding our hunger and quenching our thirst through giving us His very own Flesh and Blood in the Bread and Wine of His Holy Supper.

"I believe in God, but I sure don't need to sit in some church for that!" I overheard one young matron telling another young matron in a supermarket check-out line next to mine, as I prayed for the children perched in the child-carriers of their shopping carts, making a mental note to myself for the zillionth time *never* to go shopping in uniform again. What does the miracle at Cana mean for us? I believe it means for us, in this spiritual desert of prosperity, what it has meant for the Church in every time and in every place. True, we are neither persecuted nor rejected on account of our faith, but the society with whose values we somehow come to terms considers almost all of what we do *as the Church* to be a waste of time. But, even if we do not cave in to the mindlessness of a consumer society with no historical memory and no ideology

except the ego, except to get what / want when / want it on *my* terms, even if we value, honor and cling to the things of heaven and the things of the Church, we may and indeed sometimes we do feel as though the wine of hope and joy has run out in our individual lives, out of our relationships with others and out of our life together as the Church in this place and at this time. Ah, for the old wine that tasted so good in our youth!

Listen to me now, and I will tell you a secret God has been trying to tell everyone but which few want to hear: Jesus the Christ is among us, sometimes acting dramatically, but always working quietly behind the scenes. He is here, among us, because He hears the cries of His Church, Our Mother. And He commands us to say and to do things that may seem to us just like words on a page,

like just words spoken into the air, like so much 'filler,' like so much empty ritual, like just a wafer or crust of bread, like just a sip or drop of wine, and *He is transforming us* by these means into joy before His Father's face, into something that was better and sweeter than ever before. The joy of His marriage feast begins now and continues in the life to come! ✠ Amen.



Now to Him Who loves us and has saved us by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever.

✠ Amen.

