

Let The Celebration Continue!

John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of 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 you and to me?
My hour has not yet come.”
His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”
Now standing there were six stone water jars
for the Jewish rites of purification,
each holding twenty or thirty gallons.
Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.”
And they filled them up to the brim.
He said to them,
“Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.”
So they took it.
When 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 and 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.”
Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee,
and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

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I.

In last week's sermon we talked about "Divine identity." In the process of doing so we spoke of the various "Christologies," or ways of understanding Jesus, which are to be found in the Bible. While these Christologies are plainly different when placed side by side, they are not necessarily differing. Instead, they paint a broad(ish) perspective on Jesus, as the Christ, which expresses a *range* of understandings from a "low Christology" emphasizing Jesus' humanity, to a "high Christology" emphasizing Jesus divinity.

In today's sermon we will begin to use this Christological lens as a tool for scriptural understanding and faith exploration. This morning's text is the Wedding at Cana, which is a story found only in John's Gospel, and nowhere else in the New Testament. As such, the Wedding at Cana is uniquely "Johannine."

II.

Tomorrow is one of Rev. Mike's "High Holy Days"; when the College Football National Championship is played. Each year it is a day I give over to both feasting and frolicsomeness. For college football fans it is a bittersweet occasion representing both the culmination and conclusion of the season. This year finds two "blue blood" programs squaring off against each other: Ohio State and Notre Dame.

The *last* time Notre Dame played in the National Championship game was January 7th 2013 and they got "spanked" by Alabama 42 to 14 (ouch!). The following Sunday of that year the now defunct Canton Clergy Association had a "pulpit exchange" which found me preaching at St. Mary's Catholic Church. Boy oh boy, did I let them have it. Not that I have much restraint *anyway*, but to have a once in a lifetime opportunity to preach at the local Catholic Church and the preeminent Catholic University gets beat so badly was a "kid in a candy store" kind of moment which I could not pass up. Talk about fun!

III.

That was not the only fun I had that day, however. Doing the math you realize this was 12 years ago. I abide by the practice known as “preaching the lectionary” which is a scheduled list of biblical readings (Old Testament, Psalm, New Testament, Gospel) spanning a three year synoptic cycle (based Matthew, Mark, and Luke) with a dose of readings from John strategically sprinkled in throughout each of the years. Which means, the sermon text I used *that* day at St. Mary’s is the very same one we have before us *this* morning: the Wedding at Cana. Hence, in a “devil made me do it” moment I made the statement that Mary was a “party girl” for asking Jesus to turn water into wine so that the wedding reception could go on.

While scripturally correct, this did not go over all that well with some in attendance that day. After the service, as I shook hands with parishioners taking their leave, one little old lady said to me defiantly, “the Virgin Mother was NOT a party girl.” (Apparently she maintained a “High Maryology” and, yes, that is a real thing.)

IV.

I, though, am a “party guy.” I like to have fun, and I love to laugh. Especially when I laugh so hard tears run down my face; which is unfortunately rare these days. I really do not mind laughing at myself, or giving others cause for laughter; even if it comes at my own expense.

Which, apparently, is what children are for as my own kids just *love* to bust my chops. If I’m being honest with myself, and all of you, part of what makes having kids worth all the work is for those moments when they pay the parent back with joyous laughter. All of this may help to explain why I find the Wedding at Cana so amusing.

Though it is less the case these days, at the start of my ministry I would often be invited to the “Rehearsal Dinner” as part of the multitude of weddings I’ve performed. While this is a nice thing to do for the clergy person officiating the wedding, the practice also serves the purpose of having someone there to say the grace before the meal.

V.

On those occasions when the meal is served buffet style, I usually inform the staff or caterer that I'd like to pick which table goes first. I would make such a determination based on which table correctly names the first of Jesus' miracles. Typically, I am counting on a few scripturally astute folks who answer, "turning water into wine." To which I will say, "Close, but incorrect. Jesus' first miracle was actually turning water into *more* wine." This usually elicits a good deal of laughter, a couple of "wait, that's not fair" comments, and one or two head scratches from the more intellectually curious types as they contemplate the theological ramifications of the veracity of the statement.

For me, though, it is my way of saying, "Let the celebration begin!" Which, I admit, is correspondingly different than Mary who, in today's passage, is saying, "Let the celebration *continue!*" Like I said, Mary (the "Virgin Mother") was a party girl.

VI.

However, as is usually the case, there is almost certainly more to the story than Mary just wanting to have a good time. Though we will never know with certainty one way or the other, as it is never explicitly stated, it seems likely that the wedding involved someone from Mary's own family. Possibly, even, the wedding of one of Jesus' siblings. (Jesus was actually one of seven children, along with James, Joses, Simon, Jude and two unnamed sisters).

While there is little doubt Mary wished the *spirit* of the celebration to continue, she recognized this would be dictated by the *form* of the celebration. It is impossible to have the former without the latter. If you want to have the spirit, there needs to be a corresponding form in which, and through which, that spirit is expressed. By way of analogy, the better the joke (the form) the greater the laughter (the spirit).

VII.

Jesus' act of turning water into wine (or more wine) is considered to be the first of seven Johannine "signs" which demonstrate Jesus' divine identity (along with feeding the 5,000, walking on water, healing a lame man, healing a blind man, raising Lazarus, and healing the royal official's son). Remember, in last week's sermon we talked about how the baptism of Jesus (an account

which is absent from John) is understood to be a theophanous event: a visible encounter with a deity, or God, that reveals God's presence and character. In many ways the Wedding at Cana in John serves the same function as Jesus' baptism in the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark & Luke). That is, it announces Jesus' divine identity to the world.

Interestingly, though, whereas the Synoptics are a record of Jesus' various *miracles*, John regards many of these same events, or types of events, as *signs*. A slight distinction, except that in the Synoptics faith is what *allows* the miracles to occur, while in John signs are the *means* through which faith is elicited or created.

VIII.

As a not too terribly tangential aside, I will take this opportunity to mention what is known as the "Signs Source," which is akin to the "Q Source." As biblical scholars down through the centuries began to study the Gospels they quickly concluded that the authors of Matthew and Luke clearly used Mark's Gospel (the earliest) as a template upon which they elaborated. Additionally, there is another document known as the "Q Source" or "Quote Source" (long ago lost to antiquity) as both Matthew and Luke include these same quotes which are absent from Mark.

As is the case with "Q," the "Signs Source" in John indicates the survival of an older layer in the text of the present gospel. Part of this is owed to the switch in vocabulary from "miracle" to "sign." The word "sign" is used only rarely and negatively in the Synoptics and, there, never of the miracles Jesus had performed. In fact, some scholars so go far as to theorize that the entire Gospel of John was written around this "Signs Source" as the plot line.

IX.

Returning to the matter at hand, let us don our Christological lens and take a look at the Wedding at Cana; specifically, at the interaction between Jesus and his mother:

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 you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

You will have to decide for yourself, but to me this is no way to speak to one's mother. Personally, I was never a "spanker" but if *I* witnessed *my* son speaking to *his* mother in such a way, I would be tempted to put him over my knee. Frankly, I find that this passage paints Jesus in a light which is less than pleasant, and not at all what I would hope to find in a God purported to share my humanity. However, the author of John's Gospel, the latest of the four and furthest away from the historical Jesus, asserts a "High Christology" which emphasizes Jesus' divinity over his humanity.

X.

Which is fine. Different strokes for different folks. It serves to remind us, however, of the different ways in which Jesus is understood in scripture; one equally as true and inspired as another. As I said last Sunday, there is "wiggle room" when it comes to how each of us considers and decides upon the identity of the divine. It is not about being sloppy or imprecise but, rather, about the recognition that *any* understanding of divine identity is inevitably and inescapably incomplete.

Seen in its best light, John's account of the wedding of Cana is that moment when mama bird kicked her fledgeling out of the nest. Time to fly, Jesus. Time to let your light shine rather than hide it under a bushel. Jesus clearly was not ready to reveal himself to the world. In his self-understanding his "time had not yet come." Let us be thankful, then, for parents who rather than *pushing* their kids, *pull* them into the future for which they have helped prepare them.

XI.

Pressing the point even further, one could argue that this little episode represents a flash of "Low Christology" in John's Gospel, as one might see Jesus (the Logos, the Word, who was in the beginning, was with God, and was God) as afraid to face his future, or reluctant to do so knowing *then* what he knew would be coming *later*. Which is certainly something to which I think we all can relate and appreciate.

To this point in the sermon we have been examining what is to be found *in* the story of the Wedding at Cana. Now, I would like to end the sermon by examining what is *missing* from it. The first step in doing so is to recognize and accept that *any* Christological understanding, or quest to understand

divine identity, is missing something. However, there is *one* thing which is missing from *every* Christology I have ever seen, heard of, or read about: any semblance of a sense of humor.

XII.

While certainly in keeping with the totality of the scriptural cannon, both Old and New Testaments, which is patently ill-humored, doesn't it seem a little odd that someone we understand to be fully human never exhibits any inkling *whatsoever* of a sense of humor?

This is no small matter, no fine point. Remember, our entire theological understanding of salvation is predicated on the belief that the person who died on the cross to atone for the sins of the world was sinless and without blame while, at the same time, being *fully* human. By my way of thinking, if there is no humor there is no humanity, and the work that Christ accomplished on the Cross is less than complete. If, however, we confess to the completeness of the Cross, it follows that Christ *must* have had a sense of humor. The story of the Wedding at Cana serves to remind us that everything we see in the Bible about Jesus is not all there is to discover about Christ.

XIII.

I recognize that I have thrown a lot at you this morning. Mostly bits and pieces, and perhaps not with the same kind of clear linearity as is the case with some sermons, but certainly with the same degree of purposefulness. Which, in this case, is to affirm in you the latitude we have in understanding Christ, God, and divine identity. Moreover, for the serious spiritual seeker there is a certain degree of responsibility we share in endeavoring to expand *each* end our Christological understanding; both the divinity of Jesus and the humanity of Christ.

Given this, I would share with you that what I fancy and allow myself to imagine is a Jesus who is a bit more of a "party guy." One, who, when the wine gave out would see an immense opportunity to have a some fun, maybe bust his mother's chops for awhile before finally saying, "Sure mom, no problem! I'll even make it some really *good* wine. This is a celebration of life after all, and I might not have all that much living left to do."

XIV.

Last Sunday I shared with you a few things I have come to understand with great certainty during my pastoral ministry, what I call the “3-2-1-Nothing.” The “3” in that formula is that ministry really boils down to just *three* things: be grateful; take care of people; and, truly celebrate one’s blessings (i.e. have fun). Or, said another way: gratefulness, love, and laughter.

While many churches do well with gratefulness and love, they fall short with the third leg of the ecclesiastical stool: laughter, fun, and having a good sense of humor. Where this becomes so important, is that if we want *the* church, *a* church, *one’s* church to have a great spirit of gratefulness and love, the corresponding form in which, and through which, that spirit is best and most fully expressed is through laughter, humor, and joy.

This is more than a slight distinction because while a church with gratefulness and love may serve as a sign through which faith is elicited or created, a church which also has a good sense of humor creates and fosters a faith which *allows* miracles to occur. Or, more correctly, allows *more* miracles to occur. Let the celebration continue! Amen.