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John 2,1-11

Epiphany 2 — 19 January 2015

Greeting: To those who are called, sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; mercy, peace, and love be multiplied unto you. Amen.

We hear a portion of the Holy Gospel According to Saint John, which was read earlier:

And when the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, ¹⁰ and said to him, “Every man serves the good wine first, and when *men* have drunk freely, then that which is poorer; you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹ This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

So far the reading. Let us pray: Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O LORD, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction: Marriages are part of life. From our text, it would seem that this was so in Jesus’ time, and it is so today as well.

Marriages are times to rejoice, and guests are invited to share the joy of the bridal couple as well as the joy of the parents of the groom and bride.

There is really nothing out of the ordinary in all of this.

There is no description of a wedding ceremony in either the

Old or New Testament. From various snippets both in Scripture and from other contemporary writings, we can deduce that the ceremony itself had several constituent parts:

- a procession. The two bridal parties left their respective locations and met at a predetermined location (1 Maccabees 9,39).
- music. The processions were accompanied by music (Jeremiah 7,34).
- wedding feast. The combined parties moved to a house, usually the groom's, where the wedding feast was to take place. The feast itself could last up to a week. Music during the feast is also noted (Psalm 78:63; Song of Songs; Isaiah 5:1; Ezekiel 33:32)

The purpose then, as is the purpose now, is to give thanks to God for instituting marriage and share the joy of the bridal couple.

Let's take a look at the wedding in Cana. We do not know exactly where Cana is. There are two sites that compete for the honor of the location: one is four miles from Nazareth and the other is nine miles. But both are within walking distance from Nazareth. Archaeologists feel that the site nine miles away, which today consists of an unexcavated ruin, is probably the Cana of Jesus' day because in Hebrew Cana means "reeds," and this place has reeds and water.

Now Mary, the mother of Jesus was there, and Jesus and His disciples were also among the invited guests. It appears that Mary may have been closer to the groom's parents than Jesus, since she seems to have some relationship to the servants and perhaps the preparations for the feast itself.

At any rate, something embarrassing happened. The wedding

party ran out of wine!

Mary seems to have taken charge of the situation. She told Jesus about the situation. Exactly what was it she was expecting Jesus to do? We don't know. But Jesus saved the groom from embarrassment. Jesus turned water into wine. As a matter of fact, if you read the text, and then get out your pocket calculator, it is evident that Jesus produced quite a bit of wine, anywhere between 120 and 180 gallons of wine (maybe a bit more or a bit less, depending on what measurements are used and how much each water pot held).

By the way, there are some who are embarrassed that Jesus would turn water into wine. They say, "It must have been grape juice." Two problems with that. First, there was a Greek word for what we would call grape juice; it is not used in the New Testament or early Christian literature. Secondly, grape juice is grape juice, there is no better or worse. But wine? Yes, there is better and there is worse. Jesus' wine is the best!

What is the point of this miracle? Is it: "Be sure to have Jesus as a guest at your wedding in case the caterer runs out of something vital, like wine or food?"

Of course not!

So, what is the point? I think the point is in the phrase: "You've kept the good wine until now," or "Saving the best for last." As we look at this theme of "Saving The Best For Last" we'll develop it in three points:

- 1) Lesser Miracles**
- 2) The Right Time**; and,
- 3) The Best Wine**

1) Lesser Miracles. In theology books, theologians sometimes make the distinction between the lesser and greater miracles of Jesus. Thus, a greater miracle would be raising Lazarus from the dead. No doubt about it. That is a “biggie.” As lesser miracle, on the other hand, is the one which we read about in today’s text, turning water into wine.

In one sense, I’ve always been amused at this distinction. I’ve been amused, because it seems any miracle such as performed by Jesus at least seems to be out of my reach in my life. The best that I can do is add ground coffee to water and, presto, coffee! But water into wine? The way Jesus did it? No way.

But Jesus did turn water into wine. And He did it in rather ordinary circumstances without any fanfare and seemingly without saying, “Water, turn into wine.” He just told the servants to fill those six waterpots with water and when they had filled them to the brim. He told them. Now draw some out and take it to the headwaiter.”

It would seem that the point of all this was to show the disciples who Jesus was. The point was to show that Jesus was the Messiah for the ordinary times that people live in.

Now Jesus speaks about:

2) The Right Time. Before Jesus turned the water into wine, Mary, His mother, pointed out the shortage to Him.

As I’ve said, it seems probable that Mary was somehow involved in the wedding feast itself, since she pointed out the shortage to Jesus and was involved in ordering the servants around.

Now there are some who say that Mary knew what Jesus was

going to do, that she knew that He was going to perform some kind of miracle. But this seems unlikely. It seems unlikely because of what we know from the other Gospels. In Mark 3, Jesus and His disciples came to a house and so many others had come that they were not able to eat. When Jesus' family heard of what He was doing, "they went to take charge of him, for they said, "He is insane." Pretty soon Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Well, the point is that during His earthly ministry, not even Mary and Jesus' siblings completely grasped Who Jesus was.

But when Jesus' mother asks Jesus to do something about this shortage of wine, Jesus remarks, "Woman, what have I to do with you? My hour has not yet come." Another, more idiomatic translation reads, "Dear woman, why do you involve Me? My time has not yet come."

Who knows what Mary was thinking? Perhaps she thought that Jesus, along with His disciples, could absent themselves for a while and go to a nearby village and get more wine? Perhaps she thought that He would do something but didn't quite know what? Who knows?

Jesus' response, moreover, points to thinking that was rather different from His mother's. Jesus is thinking in ultimates. He is not just concerned about the shortfall of wine at a wedding feast, but He is thinking about His Hour, the Hour when He Himself, the Son of Man, will be raised on the Cross for the sins of the world.

John's Gospel, however, is arranged around signs that point to this coming hour. They point to Who Jesus really is and why this coming hour will be important.

Thus Jesus turned water into wine. This is the first sign of John's Gospel. It is the first sign of the redemption that is to come.

It is pointing us to:

3) The Best Wine. As a foretaste of what is to come, Jesus turns water into wine. And it is not just any wine, not just the equivalent of Chateau Plonk 2015 (hey, it was a very good week!). It is wine that is better than what was first served.

The people of Jesus' time really are no different from those today. I guess it was the custom that good wine would be served first, and when people had drunk several cups and their taste buds were dulled, then the cheaper stuff, the plonk, could be brought out. But Jesus treats the wedding party to really good wine.

The nature of Jesus is that He saves the Good Wine, the Best Till Last.

But is it just wine about which we're taking? Remember, John writes that this is a sign. This is an epiphany — that is, a manifestation or revelation — by which Jesus shows us a bit of His glory, His Godhead.

This good wine, this good wine which was saved for last, was appreciated by the headwaiter (we can only speculate whether the guests noticed).

But it is the good wine that Jesus offers us. Later in John, Jesus speaks of Himself, and says:

I am the True Vine ... I am the Vine and you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.... You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit — fruit that will last (John 15).

In fact, in Jesus' day and later, it was a common teaching

among the rabbis that the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil of which Adam and Eve ate — and from which they were not supposed to eat!— was the fruit of the vine, the grape.

As a result of the disobedience of Adam and Eve in eating that fruit, sin and death came into the world and spread to all peoples.

It was also a common belief among the Jewish people that Israel was God's true vine. But in turning water into wine, perhaps Jesus is both reclaiming and redeeming that which when eaten in disobedience to God's command brought sin into the world, as well as claiming that He is the New Israel, God's True and Eternal Vine.

Even before His hour had come, Jesus is offering Himself. This good wine is nothing else than the forgiveness offered by God for Jesus' sake. This is the forgiveness that we hear in Jesus' Supper, "given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." This is the Word by which Jesus grafts us onto Himself to be branches of the True Vine. And when we read about how much wine is now available, we see there is more than enough — there is a superabundance, and overflowing.

John writes that in this sign, "Jesus manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him." But we know that this belief was not as yet complete. That it grew as Jesus continued His ministry. We know that the disciples did not fully comprehend what Jesus was about. They did not realize or accept that Jesus had to suffer and die. Even after death, they did not realize that He would rise again —, that He would be the First-Fruits of them that will rise in the resurrection from the dead. This sign points forward to the forgiveness Jesus won for all peoples through His sacrificial death and His resurrection from the dead.

We, of course, know all this. Yet we too struggle in our lives

to live day by day and ever more completely realize what Jesus has done for us and that Jesus is with us. He forgives us so that we might continue as branches in Him.

Conclusion: In Christ, God saved and gives the best for last. Jesus began His public ministry with this so-called “lesser miracle.” He manifested His glory in a hidden way; no neon signs pointing to Him. But rather the sign was for the disciples — and us and all believers — to show us that Jesus is a Savior who wishes to be with us in the joyous, ordinary times of our lives.

In this “lesser miracle,” Jesus shows us His forgiveness and love. He shows us that He is a God who can save. And this salvation, this forgiveness is for each of us. And there is more than enough to go around.

He shows us that He is God’s True Eternal Vine and grants us life without end by grafting us into Himself — the Best has truly been saved for last! Amen.

Now, the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

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