

The Second Sunday after Epiphany

John 2:1-11

14 January, Anno Domino 2024

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Beloved Bride of the Lord Jesus Christ,

St. John tells us that this miracle is the first of Jesus miracles. Now, the word translated as “first” can also be translated as “chief”. What John is most likely indicating to us is that this miracle is the one that governs all the rest and gives definition to all the rest. That is all the more reason for us to mine the depths of this miracle and seek to rightly understand what our Lord did and taught.

Central to understanding this miracle (and truly all the miracles) is that by it Jesus “manifested His glory.” At first glance that seems simple enough. Jesus, as the Son of God, has the authority and power to change the very nature of His creation. And, indeed, this is true. As the Creator of heaven and earth, everything visible and invisible, God is not bound by His created order. He is not bound by the law of gravity or by the germ theory or by philosophical categories. God stands outside of and above creation. And what glorious good news that is! If need be God can change water into wine simply by His will. He can cause the sun to stand still in its course. He can bring people back from death. He can command the birds to bring you food if it is necessary. He can make blind eyes see and leprous skin to be as the pure flesh of a newborn child. There is nothing needed that God cannot do or provide. God is omnipotent, all-powerful. There is nothing that He cannot do if He so wills it and it is good for you.

But is His divine power Jesus’ glory? Not according to Him. We might be impressed by it and perhaps, to our great shame, that’s the most important thing to us about God - His power - because that means that He has ability to give us whatever we want or need, the power to snap His fingers and change our situation

to whatever we think it should be. But that only reveals our shortsightedness and selfishness. God is not a genie who grants wishes, good or bad. And even though He has the power, why should He hear your prayer or give you anything good? Why should He press His power into your service? Have you given Him reason? Have you made yourself worthy of His help? If all you know of God is His power, then you only have a God to be feared and you have no reason to believe that He will help you or ever do you any good.

Why then does Mary come with such confidence to Christ and seek His help for something that seems so trivial? When Mary comes to Jesus and petitions Him with the need, she likely has little else on her mind other than the plight of her hosts and she hoped that Jesus would use His divine power to fix the situation. Now that isn't entirely bad. God does say "Call upon Me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you." Jesus Himself tells us to ask, seek, and knock. Mary was certainly right to come to Jesus. We should do the same. We should not hesitate to ask for whatever it is we think we need or even just want. Ask God for miraculous healing. Ask God for a new car. Ask God to help you on your test. To do so is a beautiful confession that we believe all of our daily bread comes from our heavenly Father who loves us, who delights in us, who rejoices to see His children have what is good. When we fail to ask God we confess our unbelief and doubt in either His promises or His goodness. That is not to say, of course, that we will get exactly what we asked for. But we can be assured that God will give us what is good.

The source of Mary's confidence is set before us in her response to Jesus' seeming reproof - she still told the servants "Do whatever He tells you to do." Her faith would not be swayed. She knew Jesus would do what was good, even if that good was to let the problem remain, because she believed in the character of God which He had revealed in the Holy Scriptures. Her faith was not in the wine, but in the One who provided it. Learn from Mary. Be bold to ask Jesus for great things, even things that seem foolishly great because He Himself has commanded you. He has promised to hear you and answer you. Ask Him to miraculously heal you. Ask Him to send money or a job because you can't pay your bills. Ask Him to turn

your loved one back to the faith. Ask for the forgiveness of all your sins because you believe God when He tells you that He desires your salvation and that He would make full atonement for your sins.

Your flesh is probably telling you not to ask for such things and certainly not to hope that God will actually give them. “Ask for something more responsible and reasonable” is probably what your flesh is thinking. But that is not how Jesus teaches us to approach Him or our Father. Rather, we are to stand before God on the sure foundation of God’s own commands and promises and make our requests known to Him with all boldness and confidence. You know that Jesus’ died for you. You know that He has reconciled you to the Father. You know that you are baptized and that when your heavenly Father looks at you He sees nothing but a beloved child whose voice He loves to hear and whose needs He is delighted to meet. Ask.

But Jesus didn’t come to just perform magic tricks at weddings and give 180 gallons of wine to wedding guests who had already enjoyed a few drinks. He didn’t come to simply prove to you or to Mary that He was powerful. Jesus was driven by one purpose, what is often referred to in John’s Gospel as Jesus’ hour - His atoning death and resurrection for our salvation. Everything He did and said was governed by Calvary because Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection from the dead is everything. It fills and defines everything in His ministry - every miracle, every reproof, every teaching. It also fills and defines everything He does now for the Church, His dear Bride, and you, His dear children. When Jesus reproves Mary’s request, He’s not reproving that she asked. He’s is focusing her attention on His hour, on who He is and what He came to do, the reason for everything else that He does. He wants our requests, just like His answers, to flow from the cross and our redemption rather than fear or shame or doubt or a love of things in this life. You don’t ask for health because you are afraid of death. You don’t ask for a car so that you can gain attention for yourself. You don’t ask for your glory. You ask for His because His glory is your salvation.

That is what was manifested at Cana. Through the Old Testament prophets, God often described our salvation as a rich banquet of the finest foods and wine. God spoke through Amos “‘Behold the days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.’” (Amos 9:13) Likewise, through the prophet Joel God promises “And in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the streambeds of Judah shall flow with water; and a fountain shall come forth from the house of the Lord and water the Valley of Shittim.” (Joel 3:18) And those most beautiful words of God through the prophet Isaiah “On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well-refined.” (Isaiah 25:6)

In Jesus, those promised days have begun, though they have not yet reached their fullness. To us is poured out wine that is filled with the atoning Blood of Jesus. To us is given the very Bread of heaven as food, Jesus’ true Body. At Cana, Jesus revealed Himself as the fulfillment of God’s promises, the Messiah, through whose death man would be reconciled to God and be given a seat at the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom which has no end. This absurd amount of the best wine which Jesus provides is a testament to the superabundance of God’s mercy which will be poured out to the world on Good Friday at the hour when the Son of Man is glorified by being lifted up and pinned with nails to the cross. At that hour the true husband will pour forth His Blood in order to cleanse His Bride that she might be spotless. Nothing will be spared.

And this is what the Bride rejoices to receive - the life and salvation which her Husband has prepared. She rejoices to partake often and abundantly of what He gives for her. She rejoices to hear the voice of her Husband as He proclaims His love, truth, and righteousness to her. Her highest delight is to sit at table, feasting on the rich food of His life-giving flesh and drinking deeply of the cup of fine and blessed wine of His atoning Blood. These are life to her! She lives to receive them and lives from them. In these things, in the assurance of her salvation, in faith rather than doubt, her voice cries out to her dear Husband in every need.

And she is confident that He will answer. Even if the answer is cross, she will do whatever her Husband gives her to do because she knows with great certainty that even that is good and will bring about her good because it comes from Jesus. She seeks His glory rather than her own as He sought her good, even laying down His life to accomplish it. She knows that His mercy and love have been poured out to her in such an overflowing abundance that she has no reason to doubt that absolutely everything He gives is good.

And you who have been washed in Holy Baptism have been joined to this good Husband whose abundant mercy is promised to you. Your sin is not so deep that He can't forgive it. Your need is not so great that He cannot meet it. Let your requests be made known to Christ in the assurance that He will do what is good. If He so foolishly provided so many gallons of the best wine, much of which was likely dumped out because there was too much, how much more will He not give to you all that you need for this life and the next, even better than you know how to ask? Trust in Him as lavishly as He has poured out His mercies to you.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.