

The Chief of Signs: Christ and Marriage  
John 2:1-11  
Second Sunday after the Epiphany  
January 20, 2019

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

Our text, “This, *the first of his signs*, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

John’s gospel is the last of the gospels... written years, if not a few *decades* after the others. So, why is his gospel the *first* to mention the *first* miracle of Jesus? Have you ever noticed that the wedding of Cana is not mentioned in Matthew, Mark, or Luke?... so that this “first of signs” – Jesus changing water into wine – is known only through the gospel of St. John. Why would this be?

There are a lot of theories, but for our purposes of meditation this morning, we might consider that John’s gospel account is very theological and thematic in nature. Though there might be reason to include the wedding of Cana in the simple timeline of Jesus’ ministry as “the first of miracles”, the real reason to include it is because of the theological ‘undercurrent’, if you will, it carries regarding this Jesus, as implied when the end our text refers to this miracle as “the first of *signs*.” John’s gospel refers to the *signs* of Jesus, some might argue it’s just another word for “miracle,” but Jesus himself proclaims his giving of signs to reveal his identity, and John’s gospel closes this way: “Jesus did many other signs in the

presence of his disciples that are not recorded in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (20:30).

So, John includes the *sign* at the wedding of Cana specifically to point you to and teach you of this Christ, that you may believe on his name. Of course, that raises another question: *What* about this Jesus is John trying to teach us? That Jesus can turn water into wine doesn't seem nearly as impressive as healing the leprous or raising the dead or casting out demons. So, what is it? What is it about this sign that is so important? And what so importantly does it say about this Jesus?

Remember that John's gospel is thematic; it uses its content not to chronicle historical details (like Luke's reference that Jesus was born when Quirinius was governor of Syria), but to point to the bigger picture. The bigger picture in our text is not the difference between water and wine; nor is the bigger picture whether the wedding feast ended on a high note. The bigger picture is that on the sixth day of creation, this same Son of God – with the Father and the Holy Spirit – not only created man in his image, but created *marriage* in his own design. And, as the Christ came to sacrifice himself as the payment for sins, he also showed himself to be the great bridegroom of His Church. Its those themes John's account gives us opportunity to consider today.

First, consider God's love of the marriage estate. Not only does God create it in the perfection of Eden, not only does Christ honor it with his presence in Cana, but Christ also redeems it with his faithfulness to his adulterous bride by dying for her sins upon the cross.

In our day, how mocked, abused, and ruined is the marriage estate – artificially redefined by the arrogance of a majority of western culture to join together a man not with a helper suitable for him, but a partner identical to him; its disparaged and disregarded by all who would want its fleshly benefits without any of its divine covenants; made a mockery of by all who leave it indiscriminately or speak of it critically. Even Christian marriages often uphold the estate in theory but not in practice or love, husbands and wives keeping the *minimum* of God's plans for the estate and vowing to never get a divorce, but settling on living as two individuals with competing agendas that need to be compromised rather than living as one flesh. Our marriages are often marked with individualistic greed and gossip, laziness and lovelessness, anger and arguments, dominance or disorder in God-given roles. How can we expect the world – or our own children – to know the divine and blessed truth of marriage, the destruction of adultery and fornication and premarital licentiousness when they see the current generation treating the estate and our own marriages so callously, carelessly, so non-Christlike?

Was not Solomon, the wisest of men, the most foolish of all when he joined himself to a myriad of wives? What example did his sons have, but to think of selfishness and individual gain... so that they tore apart all of Israel and led them to a faithless demise? Did not Solomon learn from his own father, David, whose infamous adultery with Bathsheba sought refuge in the murder of a faithful husband, but was exposed and yielded the death of a son.

Yes, the consequence of sin runs deep when it comes to sins against marriage, doesn't it? In fact, it runs deep not only against marriage but against the family and – ironically – shows that the two terms are not independent of another. How many in our society have wanted to change the terms of marriage and said it will not influence traditional views of family. Now, this week, it was reported that a Google executive is under fire from company employees for using the term *family* to refer to having kids – irate employees claim the term is “right wing and homophobic.”

Yes, the consequence of sin runs deep when it comes to sins against marriage. Is it any wonder that the offspring of a culture that has openly attacked marriage since the late 1960s is a people wrought with sexually transmitted diseases, a nation whose major cities are riddled with impoverished families, homes without husbands, children without fathers, constantly longing for the government to step in and play ‘dad’... even if it means defending the “right” to destroy our unborn children; assigning orphan children

to gay couples who want a family, but not in God's divinely-given way; teaching children in the classroom that to speak of 'husband and wife' or 'mom and dad' or even of proper gender pronouns or of the God-given definition of 'families' is narrow-minded and offensive.

Meanwhile, Hollywood indoctrinates this generation to treat marriage as a romance novel – to enjoy its passions until the 'happily-ever-afters' turn into no-fault divorce and one spouse (or both) flee to the arms and bed of the next lover. And, to show how deep the consequences run: if society is not going to be built around the family and the marriage estate and its dependence upon God, then it will be built on individual success and the pursuit of happiness and financial treasures... so that we leave our parents' home at the *most* impressionable age and go off to the most prestigious university for the degree (in this generation unlike the generation of our parents, that degree is often accompanied by indoctrination in secular humanism and cynicism toward all things handed down in the home) and we go wherever the degree and career takes us, and God and family will simply have to fit in as commodities to such individual pursuits.

What a mess we have made of marriage and the family! How will we ever teach our children to understand God's marriage estate to be the foundation of creation and not merely the fulfillment of individual desire and dating games? How will we teach our children

to see the wedding as an act of God that serves as the origins of not a marriage to a trophy wife, but the origins of the faithful *family*? How will we ever win back the marriage estate, so that it is marked not by how fancy the wedding, but how faithful the vows, and how fruitful the creation that has – since Adam and Eve – been governed by this estate of marriage. You see, God gave *all* of creation – the beasts, the trees, the garden – to be dependent on and overseen by man and his wife; and *all* of creation was ruined in the Fall of man and his wife. And that means, the only way to redeem all of creation – including the estate of marriage – is through the redemption that is won by the Son of Man who gives himself for the sake of his wife.

John's gospel begins by pointing to this "first of signs" and "chief of signs" because it is *this* sign that shows the whole picture – Christ has come to redeem all of creation through His perfect marriage to the bride He has made perfect. He has come as the New Man, the New Adam, the New Bridegroom ... to give the new and better sacrifice, and – with it – to make all things new: a new creation, a new marriage between God and His people, a new covenant, a new wedding feast, new wine – the best saved for last – and it all makes new His wife, the Church. St. Paul says it this way:

"Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Notice friends, this is the second theme – not only is there the first theme of Christ’s honoring of the marriage estate he created - but now the second theme of John’s text and this “chief of signs” is that Christ is the great bridegroom, the one who saves the reputation of the first bridegroom who was supposed to provide the wine and sustain the feast... just as the first Adam’s reputation has been renewed by the second Adam (just as *your* reputation is redeemed by the One in whose righteousness you hide). And the feast between God and man continues because God and man are now reconciled through this Jesus. Indeed, Christ didn’t just die for His bride, but He also cleansed her to be presentable to God... with a cleansing that jars of purification could never accomplish. For, as we said last week, baptism’s washing is not a purification of the body, but of a clean conscience toward God. It’s the clean conscience a former adulterous wife can have toward her faithful husband *because* of His forgiveness of sins. It’s the wedding feast and celebration of marriage she can enjoy because the wine is provided anew by him – indeed his very blood – to share that joy of forgiveness with her. And to share it in a feast in which we need not worry that the sustenance runs out, the patience runs out, the love runs out... for Christ continually calls us out of our daily lives, renews our focus on our wedding garments, and seats us at the feast of heaven on earth.

And how does daily life live in and confess that joy? How does it proclaim to the world that marriage ought be defended at all costs as the foundation of the family and society, but – far more – as the confession of Christ’s love for His bride, the Church? How does that confession go forth? – St Paul says it this way...

And thus, “Husbands love your wives, as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her...”

Our marriages are to confess and point each other, our families, our society, our creation to its certain hope in the great bridegroom... for He alone can rescue the wedding feast that has fallen short and is without wine. He alone has rescued His bride from the terrible shame and embarrassment and reputation of a marriage marred by such fault and lack of righteousness. He alone has ability and abundance to continually sustain us in His wedding feast that never ends, but joyfully proclaims the bridegrooms death until he comes again to take his bride unto himself so that – having prepared the place for her – where He is, there she may be also.

In our text, Mary turns to the servants and says (translating woodenly from the Greek), “He, whatever he tells you, do it.” And those servants must have been amazed to behold the glory of God in the work of this Jesus. So it is each Sunday: the world mocks and scorns that there is nothing left to the Christian Church... that the wine has run dry and it’s time to close up the doors... and yet the servants do as this One followed by disciples tells them to do, and –

behold – the jaw-dropping truth that in the midst of an increasingly godless society, there the Church remains. In the midst of an increasingly mocking and antagonistic society, there Christ faithfully comes to His Church. In the midst of an increasingly unwelcoming society, there Christ and his Church hold their marriage feast with the bread of heaven and the richest wine, wine that the whole world – drunk in its stupor – cannot recognize, but for those guests invited to the feast, what a chief sign and working that this bridegroom is the Christ, the Son of God, in whose name, by whose faithful marriage, and in whose family... we have life.

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

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