

II Epiphany C 2022 (January 16) (Service)

Prelude (Prelude in D Minor, J.S. Bach)

Welcome to our pre-recorded service for January 16, 2022, the Second Sunday After Epiphany. I'm Pastor Curtis Aguirre. Bob Park is the musician.

Let's sing the hymn, "Praise to the Lord" #844 in the Evangelical Lutheran Worship books.

**1. Praise to the Lord, all of you, God's servants.
Blessed be the name of our God now and ever.
From the rising of the sun,
may the Lord be praised, praise to the name of the Lord!**

**2. There is none like our God in the heav'ns or on earth,
who lifts the poor from the dust, seating them with the mighty,
who stoops to raise the weak and lowly,
may the Lord be praised, praise to the name of the Lord!**

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all... And also with you.

Let us pray.

Lord God, source of every blessing, you showed forth your glory and led many to faith by the works of your Son, who brought gladness and salvation to his people. Transform us by the spirit of his love, that we may find our life together in him, Jesus Christ, our Saviour and Lord. Amen.

John 2:1-11

The Gospel according to John, the 2nd Chapter... Glory to you, O Lord!

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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.

The Gospel of the Lord... Praise to you, O Christ!

Sermon

Let me read for you the Prayer of the Day from the Marriage Service in the green hymnal—the Lutheran Book of Worship:

Eternal God, our creator and redeemer, as you gladdened the wedding at Cana in Galilee by the presence of your Son, so by his presence now bring your joy to this wedding. Look in favour upon this bride and this groom and grant that they, rejoicing in all your gifts, may at length celebrate with Christ the marriage feast which has no end. Amen.

Whoever wrote this little prayer, wrote it so carefully, so intentionally, so thoughtfully, that it is dense with meaning. Before we got the new red hymnal—the Evangelical Lutheran Worship book, which has a different prayer of the day for weddings—I used to unpack this little prayer for couples I was working with, so that at least they, of all the people at their wedding, would be

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able to catch what's going on in this brilliant little prayer.

By the same token, the story of Jesus at the wedding in Cana, the story which inspired this little prayer, is also a very carefully, very intentionally, very thoughtfully crafted retelling of something that Jesus did. On the surface it is just the story of Jesus turning water into wine at someone's wedding. Go more deeply, however, and it turns out to be a sermon on Jesus' ministry, on Jesus' relationship to the Old Testament Law, and a parable about God's Kingdom.

To enter into the story of the Wedding at Cana is to walk into a small chapel built of words, whose walls are decorated with symbolic pictures, teaching lessons with visual clues that the hearer of the story can mull over even after leaving the space.

I want to take you on a tour of this little chapel. But before we look at the pictures themselves, I have to do what any good tour guide leading a group through something ancient does: I have to give you a little historical and cultural background so that the pictures make more sense.

In the Israel of Jesus' day, weddings were seven-day long celebrations. While the religious ceremony itself was quite simple and brief, there were all kinds of cultural customs involving various people from the two families. And, of course, there was a lot of feasting and partying. The whole village would participate in some way, and relatives would come from neighbouring villages, or even farther away, to help mark the bond -- a bond not just between two individuals, but between two families.

Now let's look at the pictures on the walls of this little wedding chapel.

The story says that Jesus' mother was at the wedding, and that Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. It was customary for relatives to bring wine with them, and it is quite possible that Jesus and his disciples, who lived off the good will of others, may not have brought any wine with them. This may explain why Mary goes to Jesus when the wine runs out. She may have been scolding him, or maybe even laying a guilt trip on him—as mothers sometimes do—for having come empty handed.

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But with all these kinds of details, we have to be careful not to get hung up on the particulars as though we were trying to recreate the scene of a crime. Instead, we have to let John paint the picture and preach the sermon he intended.

Rather than think of this scene as a photograph, we have to see it as a painting by a master artist like, for example, Rembrandt. When you look at a Rembrandt portrait, you see the likeness of a real person, someone you would easily recognize from the image on the painting if you were to go back in time and run into that person on the streets of Amsterdam. But if you get up close to the painting, and look closely at the details, you'll notice that Rembrandt did not paint in fine detail. Rather, he used well-placed brush strokes and streaks to suggest the shape of the ear, to suggest the texture of the hair, to suggest the brim of the hat. Rembrandt was not interested in making an exact photograph; he was interested in portraying the personality of his subject through the picture.

John is not interested in giving us a blow-by-blow account of something that happened. John is interested in using an event in the ministry of Jesus to say something about Jesus, something about the Kingdom of God, and something about us. If we were to go back to that time, we would probably recognize the event, but we would notice that John left most of the details out of his account and focused on only the few strokes that were useful for him to communicate his message about Jesus.

So, look again at the picture of Mary, the mother of Jesus. In John and Revelation, Mary seems to function as a symbol for the people of Israel and the new Israel, the Church. In John's Gospel, Jesus interacts with his mother in two places, here at the wedding at Cana, at the beginning of his earthly ministry—and then at the cross, at the end of his earthly ministry.

Here at the beginning of his ministry, when Mary (read Israel) tries to set the agenda for Jesus, Jesus deflects the attempt. She can only encourage the servants to do as he says. At the end of his ministry when Jesus is on the cross, Jesus will give the beloved disciple (John's portrayal of the ideal follower of Jesus) to Mary to be her son, and Jesus will give Mary (John's portrayal of the Church) to the disciple to be his mother.

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The message in the wedding at Cana story is that we the Church are not the ones who direct Jesus' actions; rather we must be ready to act as he directs, we must be ready to be the servants. Besides this, Mary also names what is missing in the life of Israel, and by extension, what is missing from our lives. She says, "They have no wine."

Wine, in the Old Testament, is a symbol for joy. An abundance of wine is one of the signs that the Old Testament prophets associated with the time when the Messiah would come. But for John, wine is also communion and the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. It is in John's Gospel where it says that water and blood flowed from Jesus' side when the Roman soldier pierced his side with a spear. The wine of the communion is the blood of Christ, shed for us, and so it is also a source of the waters of everlasting life.

When Mary says, "They have no wine," she identifies that the people of Israel at that point had not yet received the Messiah, and so their lives were without the joy that comes from the Messiah. For us, we can say that we too need the wine, the blood of the new covenant, to bring God's joy to us.

Now let's look at the picture of the stone jars. It says that there were six stone jars for the Jewish rites of purification. Throughout John's Gospel, an important theme is Jesus replacing, superseding, or fulfilling what we find in the Old Testament. Here, this little story picks up that theme with numerical imagery. In the Bible, the number six is associated with incompleteness, because it is one short of the number seven, the number associated with perfection or completeness. So here we see six stone jars for the Jewish rites of purification. The implication is that these rites, and by extension the entire Old Testament Law, which was originally written in stone, is incomplete. It is awaiting its completion or perfection or fulfilment.

Jesus tells the servants to fill the jars with water. In John's Gospel, water has strong associations with life. When some of the water is taken to the chief steward, it has become the finest of wines, and it is abundantly available.

John's message is that the Law written on tablets of stone is brought to life, is transformed, and is fulfilled by Jesus, especially in light of his death on the

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cross. While the Old Testament is a profound and valuable set of writings in its own right, for those of us who receive Christ, it takes on new dimensions and new significance when we recognize how Christ fulfils it. Instead of calling it the Old Testament, we could call it the Fulfilled Testament or the Completed Testament.

Finally let's look at the picture of the disciples. In the Wedding at Cana story, they are mentioned only at the very beginning, and at the very end. In John's Gospel, the disciples, and especially the so-called Beloved Disciple, are meant to stand for us, the readers or hearers of this Gospel. We are there, witnessing what is going on, seeing these events with eyes of faith. Here, we have witnessed the first of seven signs in John's Gospel that Jesus will perform.

This first sign takes place at a wedding. Both the Prophets and Jesus use wedding imagery to talk about the Kingdom of God. So, we, the disciples, begin our time with the master, getting a taste of the joy and abundance of God's kingdom. But the earthly wedding celebrations are just a dim shadow of what God has in store for us. Here on earth, the wine and the joy inevitably run out. In God's realm, in the presence of Jesus, the wine does not run out, the joy is overflowing, and it is of a quality which we cannot produce ourselves.

Having seen what Jesus did, even though none of the other guests have seen it (though the servants have), we come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. That is John's express hope in his Gospel for all who hear it or read it, and it is the reason he wrote his Gospel. But how interesting that in the story, it is not the honoured guests who see what happens, but only the lowly servants. This is John's subtle way of portraying in pictures what Jesus often said in words: the first will be last and last will be first.

John is very visual. In John's Gospel, in the First Letter of John, and in Revelation, John says repeatedly that he is relating to us what he has seen with his own eyes, in the hope that we, the hearers and readers, may come to believe that Jesus is the Son of God. So here, in the first of Jesus' signs, we have caught a glimpse of his glory in a quiet, subtle act laden with symbolic significance.

I began this little tour with the LBW's Prayer of the Day for weddings. Let me

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read it again, with a few modifications, and let it be our prayer together now.

Eternal God, our creator and redeemer, as you gladdened the wedding at Cana in Galilee by the presence of your Son, so by his presence now bring your joy to us. Look in favour upon us, and grant that we, rejoicing in all your gifts, may at length celebrate with Christ the marriage feast which has no end. Amen.

Let's sing the hymn "Jesus, Come! For We Invite You" #312 in the Evangelical Lutheran Worship books, but we will be using the melody from #318, "Alleluia, Song of Gladness".

1. Jesus come! for we invite you, guest and master, friend and Lord;
now, as once at Cana's wedding, speak and let us know your word;
lead us through our need or doubting, hope be born and joy restored.

2. Jesus come! transform our pleasures, guide us into paths unknown;
bring your gifts, command your servants, let us trust in you alone:
though your hand may work in secret, all shall see what you have done.

3. Jesus come! in new creation, heav'n brought near in pow'r divine;
give your unexpected glory, changing water into wine;
rouse the faith of your disciples—come, our first and greatest Sign!

4. Jesus come! surprise our dullness, make us willing to receive
more than we can yet imagine, all the best you have to give:
let us find you hidden riches, taste your love, believe and live!

Let us confess our faith using the words of the Apostles' Creed.

I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth.

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I believe in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord,
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,
born of the virgin Mary,
suffered under Pontius Pilate,
was crucified, died, and was buried;
he descended to the dead.
On the third day he rose again;
he ascended into heaven,
he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,
the holy catholic church,
the communion of saints,
the forgiveness of sins,
the resurrection of the body
and the life everlasting. Amen.

Prayers

Let us pray for all people according to their needs. I will end each petition with the words, "Lord, in your mercy," Please respond by saying, "Hear our prayer."

(Brief silence to let people gather their thoughts.)

God the Holy Spirit, you create and sustain the Church throughout the world by bestowing your gifts on the people who form this Church. Help us all to recognize and rejoice in the gifts that you have given, and to make faithful use of them for the good of all. Lord, in your mercy... Hear our prayer.

God the Son, through you all things are created. Guide us to be good stewards of this planet earth and all the life on it that you have entrusted to our care so that we may return it to you whole and unsullied. Lord, in your mercy... Hear our prayer.

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God the Father, you are pure light shining beyond light, and in the light of your righteousness all injustice is exposed. Guide the leaders of the nations to embrace good and reject evil, so that all people may be able to live in peace, enjoy true justice, and rejoice in the world that you have made.
Lord, in your mercy... Hear our prayer.

Holy Trinity, One God, you have made us humans a complex interplay of body, mind, and spirit; of physical, mental, and spiritual needs, desires, and hopes. As in you there is perfect balance, so help us to find that sacred balance that is the wholeness you intend for us, especially during this time of pandemic when so much seems out of balance. Lord, in your mercy... Hear our prayer.

Let us pray for all who are ill or suffering in any way, let us now name them before God...

(Leave long silence to give people a chance to bring their loved ones before God)

For all these, Lord, in your mercy... Hear our prayer.

We give thanks for the faithful departed who have gone to join the marriage feast that has no end. May their examples inspire us to lives of faith active in love. Lord, in your mercy... Hear our prayer.

Into your hands, gracious God, we commend all for whom we pray, trusting in the gift of your Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who taught us to pray...

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.
Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.
Save us from the time of trial and deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours, now and forever.
Amen.

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Benediction

**The Lord bless you and keep you;
the Lord's face shine on you and be gracious to you;
the Lord look upon you with favour and (+) give you peace.
Amen.**

Postlude (Minuet, Fernando Sor)