

Jeffrey A. Johnson
Peace Lutheran Church
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TEXT: John 2:1-11

So many epiphanies! So many revelations of Jesus!

On Epiphany Sunday itself, two weeks ago, we see Jesus revealed to the wise men. For them, it was an eye-opening, jaw-dropping experience. Last Sunday we saw the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, descending upon Jesus at His baptism—yet another epiphany, another revelation from God that this Jesus was indeed Someone Special. This was confirmed by the voice from the sky, “This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” Today we see the revelation of Jesus as a miracle-worker, an epiphany in which He is further revealed as Divine.

The epiphany to the wise men only involved only a few—those wise men, perhaps their entourage, and Joseph and Mary. The epiphany at Jesus’ baptism involved even more. There was John the Baptist, of course, but also a great crowd standing on the banks of the Jordan, witnessing all this. Today, the epiphany of Jesus as God involves even more—a whole town full of people who were celebrating this wedding at Cana, although most of them were unaware of the miracle that had happened. For His disciples, however, this is a pivotal moment. The text tells us that they “believed in Him” from this day forward. Surely they knew He was Someone Special or they wouldn’t have left everything to follow Him. But now, in Cana, they’re convinced He’s the Messiah. We see in these three stories the widening revelation of Jesus as the Messiah, God’s Anointed One—and this pattern continues with greater and greater crowds following Him culminating perhaps in the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 (which was really more like 20,000 when you include the women and children). We can expect the greatest of His epiphanies to occur when He returns at the end of time. The Bible tells us (Phil 2:10-11) that “every knee will bow” and “every tongue will confess” Him as Lord.

Christianity, unlike some other religions, isn’t a faith of hidden mysteries to figure out. God wants to make Himself known to all and the means through which He’s done that is with the

incarnation of Himself to earth, in the person of Jesus, and, following Him, the various manifestations of His Holy Spirit—going on yet today.

One of the ways by which God revealed Himself was through the various miracles—called signs and wonders—which Jesus performed. This one of the water-to-wine at the Cana wedding was His first, or at least the first recorded for us in the scriptures. It was a sign—a subtle sign but a powerful one to those “in the know”—that this was no ordinary man.

Signs. I often find myself chuckling over signs I read—including many church signs, like...

(here show several funny church signs)

The signs that Jesus did, however, were not to be laughed over but to be stood in awe of, to stand speechless before, to fall to your knees, like those wise men did, in wonder before.

Let’s look at the story. Turn in your Bibles, please, to John, Chapter 2, starting with verse 1.

The “third day” referenced here could mean Jesus had journeyed for three days from where He was—the Jordan River?—to Cana or, more likely, it’s just a date marker by John, the Gospel writer. John moves his narrative along by frequently saying, “the next day” or “the following morning.” Regardless of how you interpret this, I can’t help but seeing a veiled reference to the three days Jesus spent in the grave before His coming out to glory. The dying wedding party was resurrected by the miracle Jesus wrought.

Now weddings in that part of the world at that time were big affairs. They would often be a week in length. Bilagaana sometimes roll their eyes at Native American wedding and funerals, the observances of which goes on for days, but this was true at the time of Jesus, as well. They were expensive affairs, requiring the contributions of the entire extended family to feed and entertain the many visitors who’d come. There was none of this 11am to 3pm stuff such as Caleb

Thomas and Sophie Phaturros scheduled for their recent wedding. That would have been seen as ludicrous—and chintzy.

Let's take a look at where Cana is. (Project a map.) Cana is about 4 ½ miles north of Nazareth, Jesus' hometown. It's quite possible that the bride or groom were relatives of Jesus; they were certainly friends or Jesus and His mother wouldn't be invited. Here again we see a big difference between weddings then and now. Now, we expect people to RSVP and we prepare for a certain number of people. It's a rare wedding today that is open to the entire community and the more the merrier. But that was the situation with weddings at the time of Jesus. There were no RSVPs; it was expected that everyone would come—and they did! Furthermore, they might bring their friends with them—and no ill would be thought of that. The big-hearted and generous hosts had not only invited Jesus but all of His disciples to join them for the celebration--and Jesus had all twelve of them by then. These disciples weren't from Nazareth or Cana—probably not family and most likely not even acquaintances of the hosts, but yet they were invited and would have been welcomed by the hosts. These were big affairs, requiring years of saving for the expense of it. We see this kind of hospitality still in various cultures around the world but it's rare in any of our Western cultures where individualism, rather than communalism, triumphs.

Mary, Jesus' mother, was present. If she was a late teenager, say 18, when she gave birth to Jesus and Jesus is now 30 years old, which He was, Mary is in her late 40s. She's had other children by this time. We know the names of four of Jesus' brothers, and there were sisters, too. The point being, Mary is middle-aged and has had many years of contact with Jesus. She knows His ways and remember, she's a “pondering” sort of woman, reflective. She's aware that Jesus is Someone Special but she doesn't know yet, as we do, the extent of His specialness.

I want to make a point of the fact that Jesus went to this wedding. While He practiced and, no doubt, treasured, moments of reclusiveness, He engaged with His people and His society. He didn't hide away from people. He interacted and enjoyed life. I'm confident He didn't sit in a corner with His arms crossed, judging the merry-makers, nor studying the scriptures all day long. No, I'm guessing He was right in there with them, maybe even the life-of-the-party. He had a winsome personality. There's a time and a place for seclusion. There's a time and a place for

seriousness. But there's a time and a place for celebration, too—and Jesus was a part of that. He loved life!

But at some point, verse 3, the wine runs out. How embarrassing! Those of you who practice hospitality and entertain others know how humiliating it can be if you run out of one of the staples of your meal. It means you hadn't planned properly or, possibly, didn't have the funds to live up to what you'd promised. The host is in a conundrum.

Mary, privy to what's going on, calls Jesus aside and informs Him of the situation. Did she really need to tell Him? Of course not! He's God; He knew the situation but even if He was only human, word would have spread quickly around the merry-makers that a key ingredient to their celebration had run out.

Jesus calls His mother, "Woman," but please don't put our culture's judgment on that title. We would say that was rude of Jesus but it really wasn't. That's how a female would have been addressed at that time—and it wasn't a put-down or condescension. It was a customary and even polite form of address to a female. Remember, Jesus would use this term again with His mother when He's hanging on the cross—and in that context He's lovingly looking after her.

Jesus is not quite ready to come out-of-the-closet, so to speak, as the Messiah. He's holding back—and wouldn't you, if you knew what lay at the end of that road? "My hour has not yet come," He tells her, wanting to delay the inevitable.

Mary isn't offended by Jesus' response. She doesn't talk back to Him. She simply says to the servants, "Do whatever He tells you." I want to come back to this. This will be my main point with you today but for now I want to move on in the text.

Six stone water jars each holding twenty or thirty gallons would have been 175 gallons of wine. That's a LOT of wine, isn't it? WAY more than what would be needed to finish out the celebration. Why all this extravagance? Why all this excess?

Why indeed. Jesus here isn't like my grandson this Christmas who made chocolate pudding for everyone but didn't calculate properly and ended up using bigger bowl after bigger bowl to contain his burgeoning recipe. No, Jesus knew what He was doing—and what He was doing, I think, was to demonstrate, in His subtle way, that His God, their God and our God is a BIG God. He's not tight-fisted. He's not stingy. He's not reluctant to share His blessings. No indeed. This up-and-coming Messiah was demonstrating that God is a lavish God, an over-the-top God, a God of unmeasurable grace.

We see this in other stories with Jesus, don't we? When He fed the 5,000 on that mountain, did all those people barely have enough to stem their hunger? Did Jesus provide a meagre, scant meal? (Solicit response.) No way! Everyone ate and had their fill PLUS there were leftovers, weren't there? How many? (Solicit response.) Twelve baskets full of leftover. Our God isn't miserly. He's not a Scrooge.

And remember the post-resurrection story of the disciples having spent all night fishing with zero results? When Jesus told them to cast their net on the other side, did they catch only a few fish? Enough for a good meal for themselves? (Solicit response.) No! There were so many fish, the text tells us the net was breaking. Our God isn't close-fisted, penny-pinching and parsimonious.

Our God is prodigal. That doesn't mean wayward and unscrupulous. Prodigal comes from prodigious, which means lavish, generous, abundant. The prodigal son was excessive in his foolishness—that's why we use that term with him—but the father in that story was even more prodigal in his welcoming back of his foolish son and in the party he threw for him. That prodigal father is our prodigal God. One-hundred seventy five gallons of wine!

We're not told how the water was turned to wine, are we? Jesus instructs the servants to "Fill the jars with water" to the brim. And they do. He then instructs them, verse 8, to "draw some out" and take it to the man in charge of the celebration, the chief steward. And the servants did it. Let me repeat that, "and the servants did it." Did they know the water had been turned into wine? Not at that point. Perhaps there was a change in the color of the liquid, perhaps they could smell

the aroma of wine but at the time they dipped their vessel into the jar, they were simply following orders. They were ignorant of the miracle.

Oh people, this is my message for you today: trust God! Trust that God is good and that God is powerful and that God knows what He's doing. Even if you can't see it. Even if it doesn't seem logical to you. Even if it doesn't make sense. He is God; you're not. Listen to Him.

When Mary said to the servants, "Do whatever He tells you," that's her message, and mine, and the Bible's to you, as well: "Do whatever He tells you." He knows what He's doing. He sees the big picture. You do not. Adam and Eve in the Garden, didn't trust God with their lives and oh the grief that followed—for them and all of us. We don't have to be like that. We can live victoriously—in spite of some awful, terrible stuff—if we trust that God knows what He's doing. "Do whatever He tells you."

The rest of the story is simply wrap-up. Well, almost...

I liked what one commentator said about this story. Walter Elwell writes that when the steward said to the bridegroom, "You have kept the good wine until now" (vs. 10), we're being told that Judaism had run dry. The substance of the Jewish religion had evaporated. It had run out. But now Jesus, the new wine, has come—indeed the best 'til last. Jesus is saying through this wine-making miracle, "It's a new day. The Messiah—the best—has come." Drink of Him. Follow Him.

The story concludes (vs. 11) by stating that this was the first of Jesus' public signs—or miracles—and in doing it He "revealed His glory." He revealed Himself. How showed Himself for who He was. He was manifesting Himself to the world. It was an epiphany.

And the result? "His disciples believed in Him." Was their belief mature? Was their faith fully developed? No. They were like children who state they believe in God. Do they? Yes, but they don't know fully what that means or where it will lead them. It was but the beginning of their faith journey with Jesus. But to the extent they were able, they believed in Him.

And so, too, do we. We don't know everything. We can't comprehend all of who God is—but we trust insofar as we know and are able. And that's good enough for the time being. But the disciples didn't stop at Cana in their relationship with and comprehension of Jesus. They went on to mature in their faith—and so must we.

And one big way to mature in our faith is to “Do whatever He tells you.” Obedience is key. We don't follow, we don't obey, we don't “do” in order to gain acceptance by God. God already accepts us and our baptism is our promise of that. But, as His daughters, as His sons, we want to grow, we want to mature, we want to understand more and more what it means to be a child of the King—and so we “Do whatever He tells you,” trusting that things will become clearer as we go about being obedient.

Let me conclude with just one more thing. Mary and I watched the movie *Miracle From Heaven* the other night. It's a true story about a ten-year-old girl from Texas who develops a strange intestinal disorder and nearly dies. In spite of the care of the best medical professional, she's wasting away. Her body simply can't process food. Then, following a fall, she comes around and testifies to her visit to heaven during this period of unconsciousness. At the conclusion of the story, the mother, who had lost her faith during the illness of her daughter, testifies to the miracles all around us. This mother encourages the people in her church to open their eyes to the everyday miracles which surround them—and she goes on to tell of a few.

I'd like to do the same with you today. There are miracles, signs, epiphanies of God going on all the time, every day, all around us. Do we have eyes to see the water being turned into wine? Do we have ears to hear, hands to touch, feet to take us to the wonders and delights of this life—epiphany after epiphany of our prodigal God? We do! Regardless of your situation, I want to encourage you, as this mother encouraged her church members, to be open to all the glories of God in our lives—the ordinary and the extraordinary. When we're “doing whatever He tells us to do,” I'm confident we'll experience—and delight in—more and more of that “good wine” He gives to His people—because He loves us. Amen.

Songs:

Opening	“Jesus, Come! For We Invite You” (ELW#312 sung to the tune of “Angels From the Realms of Glory”
Psalm 36:5-10 in Song	“Your Love, Oh Lord” by Third Day (Worship Team)
Sermon	“Joyful, Joyful We Adore Thee” (ELW#836)
Offertory	“He Is Able” by Nolan and Ferguson
During Communion	Two YouTube Videos: “Wine Into Water” by T. Graham Brown “I Serve A Savior” by Josh Turner
Closing	“Songs Of Thankfulness And Praise (ELW#310)