

LFLC January 16, 2022 – Epiphany 2 – John 2:1-11

John's description of the Wedding in Cana of Galilee is both captivating and perplexing. Captivating, because of the setting, the conversation between Mary and Jesus, the crisis of wine running out and, of course, the 'SIGN' as John describes it, of about 120 gallons of water being turned into wine.

It is perplexing for some of the same reasons – why did Mary turn to Jesus about the wine? And why did Jesus tell his Mother it was none of their business and then go and perform this amazing miracle?

I started my ruminations by remembering our own wedding. I thought May was the merry month for marriage. Linda thought an early winter wedding with a coating of snow and a few snowflakes was far more romantic. I won't tell you who won - even though the evening ended with a snowstorm – it was beautiful and fun.

I also realized most Clergy perform many fewer weddings these days. Marriage, as a ceremony, is not much in vogue these days.

There are these 'destination' weddings in some exotic location – guests are expected to pay for plane tickets and hotel rooms – and probably a gift a little pricier than a salad bowl – we got three of them.

For many these days, a wedding just seems to be an expensive and unnecessary ritual – just have a party.

So too with funerals – now called Celebrations of Life. Clergy are not required as much anymore lest they bring a note of serious reflection that might make people think too deeply about what is happening.

God is pushed to the margins when we are feeling in control. Then, in times like these, God is blamed for not showing up. The conversation goes something like: "if God is love and all powerful, then why doesn't God do something to end Covid 19, or hunger - or help my bank account, come to think of it?"

We are not just individual Christians, but part of a Covenant family.

God chose a slave people to carry God's light into the world and at Sinai God entered into a Covenant with Israel. God would be Israel's God, and Israel vowed to be God's people. The terms of the Covenant were God's promise to be faithful, and Israel's promise to uphold the Law.

This was a mutual relationship – sealed with blood.

Later, as recorded in Isaiah 62, God's promises were reformulated as Wedding Vows. This time God makes the promise to remove Israel's forsakenness and together rejoice in fulfillment of love and a new relationship - a renewal of Covenant promises.

Given the Isaiah pronouncement, that Jesus' first 'sign' was at a wedding should not be discounted.

You can visualize what a small-town wedding would be like. There would be invited guests but everyone would just show up.

- People were poor and meals were plain and meagre. Wine was only shared occasionally and usually watered down.
- Who wouldn't enjoy a feast, wine flowing, music and dance?

Was it poor planning, too many people, the poverty of the parents? – we don't know, but the wine gave out.

Mary, years removed from meek and mild, and obviously a take-charge person, tells Jesus the problem.

Here is where the Interpreter meets a roadblock. What was going on in Jesus' mind? Why did he declare no interest and then go and do something about?

And what Jesus did! . . . the quantity and quality of wine. 120 gallons of the best – *Happy Days Are Here Again*, sang the village chorus!

But Jesus didn't just perform a sign – he first needed some help. The servants had to fetch water and fill the vats – then the miracle happened.

What I believe Jesus was doing was to bring new life to old traditions. The Pharisees were legalists and literalists who obeyed all the rites of purification, but these rites no longer brought hope or joy – they just seemed empty.

In Jesus, the Covenant was being renewed – faithfulness and joy were coming again to God's people – but the people would need to respond!

There are 7 'signs' in John's Gospel – the last being the raising of Lazarus. In each one there is new life, new hope, new joy. But also, in each, there is a need expressed, a willingness to allow Jesus to bring renewal – new life – new hope.

It is interesting in the lesson today, that the only people who knew what Jesus was up to, were the servants who brought the water. And that is the point today . . .

- We do not perform the miracles; we bring what is necessary that the glory of God may be revealed.

Why does God not feed the hungry? Do we bring our own gifts – share of our own resources in faith?

Why does not God end violence and wars? Do we learn the ways of peace and forgiveness? Take the risks necessary?

God can do what God wants. **But our Christian faith is covenantal!**

Jesus once took wine and said to the disciples – “This is the NEW COVENANT sealed in my blood. Drink this for the remembrance of me”. We bring the bread and the wine – we bring ourselves – that these common elements of life may be blessed, transformed and multiplied for the life of the world.

The Church in developed countries is in trouble – aging, lack of interest. We spend a lot of money to maintain buildings and meeting budgets. Seminaries are attracting fewer young people especially. Active members feel discouraged.

Long ago, Paul told the Church in Corinth that this is a new day. Once they were following idols – and stop there – **we do not create little objects we worship** – (although I wouldn’t mind a new electric vehicle) – but our idols in the Western nations are basically material – we want to live on our own terms and we will create our own gifts for ourselves, thank you very much.

Paul goes on to say, as followers of Jesus, the Spirit gives us gifts – gifts for the common good – gifts for the building up of community. Each of us has at least one of these gifts.

Our Churches are still important and what we do here is essential for our life together. But are there sources of new life which we are neglecting – forgetting?

We need to stop thinking we are somehow helpless to bring change in this community or world.

The Spirit has given each of us – and I mean EACH of us – gifts for the common good.

Jesus waits – waits for us as servants to bring our gifts that the miracle of grace may grow and spread and bring joy.

Old rites and ceremonies can be renewed as we bring our gifts of faith and obedience to God.

The Little Drummer Boy had no money or fine gifts to bring the newborn king. So he brought his drum and played a song.

Joy is the gift Jesus brings – the deep joy of reconciliation and new life in the Triune God – now let us do our part and bring our gifts so the glory of God may be revealed.

For us moderns – being the servant is always the hard part.

Amen