



“God Made Known – In the Wine”

Second Sunday after Epiphany
Sunday, January 20, 2019
11:00 am Traditional and
Contemporary Services
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10;
1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

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

The Gospels record thirty-five miracles performed by Jesus. And in the Gospel of John, each miracle is a sign. It's meant to point people to the truth that Jesus is the Divine Son of God who has come down from heaven. The light that has come into the world, the flesh that has become realized for you and for me.

In this early part of John's Gospel, we hear his first miracle, a wedding at Cana in Galilee. There is a good chance it might be a family wedding, Jesus is there with his mother. His disciples who are friends are invited to go as well. Cana is a small village around 3.5 miles from Jesus' home in Nazareth. The wine runs out and Jesus is asked by the mother to do something about it as her son. And so, he takes these stone jars, these large stone jars that were filled, not with drinking water, but with water for the Jewish rites of purification. In other words, these are the stone jars that are there so people can wash their hands before the meal, and before the prayers, and the marriage ceremony itself. Yes, Jesus makes wine out of dirty hand washing water.

Now weddings were a big deal for Jewish families in the time of Jesus. The festivities could last for over a week, it was like an open house. You would open your house up and the relatives and the friends would just stop by in the celebration. The bride and the bridegroom were treated like royalty, they even wore crowns on their heads and fancy bridal robes. It was a big community feast and celebration. So, running out of food, running out of wine was considered a cardinal sin on a celebration that was supposed to be so extravagant. It was more than an embarrassment, it was a social faux pa. And there were even recorded some instances where the offending family was fined by the community for not providing enough.

It is in this context that Jesus turns the water into wine. Now if you know anything about wine making, you take the grape, you crush the grape, you allow it to ferment, and over time it turns into wine. The grape juice is really primarily made up of water and so water turning into wine is kind of a natural process. It just needs time to make it happen. But Jesus speeds up the natural process so that just over a period of minutes it's able to become wine to continue the celebration. I am not sure that's the point of

the story anyway. This reception, this wedding reception goes from a potential disaster and embarrassment to the family to a roaring success when a steward in public compliments the bride and the bridegroom for what they have done, for what they have given to their guests, the good wine served last. And it all happens because Jesus is there. Jesus is present for the celebration.

Now if you were to do a little Bible study on wine, you'll find that there are 40 negative references to wine in the Bible. Most of those have to do with the potential dangers of drinking too much wine, such as drunkenness. But there are over 145 positive references. Those usually have to do with similar stories like this, the celebration of family and friends gathered together either for a social event like this or perhaps for a worship event. And then there are 62 more neutral times where wine is brought up usually involving vows of abstinence on the participant.

In the Bible wine has a lot of symbolic meaning. For example, one of those is transformation, that idea of that breaking down of the grape and bringing it back together and integrating it from the parts into wholes – from the grape juice to wine. Another symbolic meaning is that of strength. The vines growing and twisting and producing. Friendship is one of the symbolic meanings of a family and friends gathering together to celebrate in community. The friendship towards neighbors, perhaps in making a pact with one of your neighbors and then celebrating that with a meal including wine. Of course, there is also the sign of blessing of the offering, the Passover meal, the drink offering, and then there is also the symbolism of life itself. The red quality of the wine looking like blood. And of course, joy and celebration, such as in this celebration of a wedding in Cana in Galilee.

Too little wine and we understand how it can enhance food and celebration, too much wine and you can lose self-control.

But as I said, I think the miracle of this story is more than just about the quality of the wine, this miracle fits the pattern of Jesus and his ministry. In other words, when left to our own resources we will run dry, we will find ourselves in life empty. Because life is too complex. The problems that we sometimes face are too challenging and our own solutions can seem too limited.

But Jesus comes to be savior and comforter, and healer. He comes to bring joy when life is empty. God in the flesh, bringing joy when celebration is marred by scarcity and potential embarrassment.

And another miracle is done when you and I participate in that miracle. In the community of the church where we come with different backgrounds, different ethnicities, different social, economic, and religious background. Some are blessed with riches, some with good looks, some with abilities, sports or math or organization or cooking, even for the young kid video games.

But it is the one spirit given to each and every one of us that provides us with a variety of gifts and services and activities, all for building up of the body, the building up of the church.

Listen again to those gifts that are given that Paul talks about. Wisdom. Knowledge. Faith. Healing mercy. Discernment. A variety of blessings, an abundance of blessing from the God of abundance.

To each one of us, Jesus gives us a better quality of life. As in Cana of Galilee and right here in Camp Hill scarcity is met with the overwhelming generosity of God on so many different levels. A marriage feast that Jesus inaugurated in Cana Galilee continues today and it is celebrated where ever the church gathers around bread and wine and word, a foretaste of that feast to come. The spirit and the gifts build up and are shared. Wine is given, bread is offered for the salvation of all, and God makes himself known in the wine, and the party with Jesus goes on forever! Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the + Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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