

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Septuagesima Sunday, February 20, 2011

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 18, 19:1, 134, 41, 50.

Lessons: Isaiah 62:1-5, 1 Corinthians 12:1-11, John 2: 23-25.

Sermon Text: John 2:1-11.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

We believe that Jesus Christ is true God as well as true man. That he is true God makes him omnipotent, able to do anything. While he was on earth Jesus performed miracles, and more than 30 of those miracles are recorded in the Scriptures. His first miracle is recorded in our text and so today, we see that

JESUS' FIRST MIRACLE CONFIRMS HIS DISCIPLES' FAITH IN HIM

1. **At a wedding in Cana, Jesus turns water into wine.**
2. ***"He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him."***

When John writes "***On the third day,***" he is referring to the fact that three days before this history, Jesus had called his first disciples. Jesus came with them to a wedding in Cana of Galilee. On a map, we would see that Cana is in the north-central part of the region, midway between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea. Jesus may have had six disciples with him: Andrew, Peter, John, James, Philip, and Nathanael. Jesus' mother was also at the wedding. We don't know what connection they had with the wedding except that Jesus' mother seems to have been close enough to the bride and groom to perhaps be involved with the serving and to assume some authority over the servants.

An unusual thing happened during the wedding celebration. The wine ran out. A Jewish wedding at this time in history was often a long celebration. Often at a Jewish wedding the entertaining continued for a full week at the groom's home, following a procession from the bride's home to his. Since wine was a staple for meals, it would be a major embarrassment to be without it. It is difficult to know exactly when the shortage occurred. Some think the newly married couple was poor, which would explain why the wine ran out early. Others think that Jesus and his disciples were unexpected guests and used up tightly rationed supplies.

But what is really important is that this event is the setting for the first miracle of Jesus' ministry. His mother came to him. "***They have no more wine,***" she said. She told Jesus of the shortage, possibly expecting him to do something about it, possibly simply to let him know he and his disciples should not expect any wine to drink. Exactly what she might have wanted him to do isn't clear. We aren't told, so we can only speculate. It is possible that she hoped for a miracle. Remember, this was the virgin mother who had learned from an angel that she would bear the Savior. This was Mary, who pondered the things about Jesus in her heart. She believed in him as the One sent from God, who was truly the Son of God, truly God himself.

Jesus' response suggests that he knew she wanted him to work a miracle, if necessary. Otherwise he would have had no reason for putting her off as he did. "***Dear woman, why do you involve me?' Jesus replied. 'My time has not yet come.'***"

Mary wanted to fill an immediate need and to avoid embarrassment for the wedding couple, and she spoke as his mother. Jesus needed to reveal himself as the Messiah to strengthen the faith of his disciples, and he spoke to her as her Savior. Their purposes were essentially different, although when he accomplished his purpose he would also satisfy hers. We might be reminded of our prayers and how God answers them. We have a specific time frame in which we want our prayers answered. We want God to do things for us when WE want it and aren't always content to leave the timing of our needs and wants in God's hands.

In all that he did on earth, Jesus was bound to act at the hour set for him by the Father in heaven. In the Father's time Jesus would work a miracle. Also in the Father's time, about three years later, Jesus would lay down his life for lost sinners.

Mary believed and trusted Jesus. She ordered the servants of the feast, ***"Do whatever he tells you."*** When we think about these words, we must realize how important they are for everyone even today. So often we want to ignore what God says in his Word, thinking we know better. But every word of God is written for our learning and for our benefit, especially our eternal benefit.

"Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water'; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, 'Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.' They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, 'Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.'"

Mary's faith was well-placed, and the scene was set. ***"Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing."*** For purification the Jews washed their hands before and after eating, and they washed the cups, pitchers, and kettles for the dinner (Mark 7:3-4). Although the actual size of the measure used for the jars here is uncertain, they were ample enough to accommodate all the wedding guests. The amount of 20 to 30 gallons per jar is probably accurate, a total of 120 to 180 gallons. Even the most conservative estimate of Bible scholars allows for a total of 60 gallons. Jesus ordered the servants to fill the jars, and they did – ***"to the brim."*** Jesus would turn all those gallons of freshly drawn water into wine.

This is really a large supply of wine. There are people who can hardly imagine Jesus doing it. Could he condone and promote such a use of alcohol? He could, and he did, in keeping with the needs of the banquet and his divine generosity. The wine was to last perhaps several more days, and even likely to be a wedding gift to provide the couple until the next grape harvest. Scripture warns us not to drink too much alcohol, as for example in Proverbs 23:20: ***"Do not join those who drink too much wine or gorge themselves on meat,"*** and in Proverbs 23:29-35: ***"Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? Those who linger over wine, who go to sample bowls of mixed wine. Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly! In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. Your eyes will see strange sights and your mind imagine confusing things. You will be like one sleeping on the high seas, lying on top of the rigging. 'They hit me,' you will say, 'but I'm not hurt! They beat me, but I don't feel it! When will I wake up so I can find another drink?'"*** However, Scripture does not totally forbid drinking alcohol. In fact, Jesus himself used wine at the institution of the Lord's Supper. As the master of the banquet soon attested, Jesus gave an ample supply of quality wine for its proper use.

Jesus then had the servants draw from the stone jars and bring the water turned to wine to the master of the banquet. The master is the one who had organized the banquet and oversaw the serving of the food and drink. The servants knew Jesus had worked a miracle, but their master did not. The master tasted the wine first,

as he did all the food served at the banquet, and he marveled that such choice wine was coming so late in the celebration.

He then calls the bridegroom aside and talks to him. He exclaimed to the bridegroom that wedding celebrations usually are different from this one. People have plenty of good wine to drink at first. Then, when their sense of taste has been blunted by plenty of drinking, they get cheaper wine. Not so with this wedding! Here the choice wine has been held back until later.

The expression “after the guests have had too much to drink” troubles some readers. No one wants to envision Jesus at a wedding with drunken guests. Some scholars, therefore, translate the verb “have drunk freely,” which is a possibility. But when we realize the master of the banquet was emphasizing how refreshingly different the wedding at Cana was from a typical wedding, the problem disappears. In addition, water was often mixed with wine for drinking.

“This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.”

Christians frequently cite this account to show how Jesus honors marriage and in addition, also gives lavish gifts when they are least expected. Knowing the size of the jars, we also know the bounteousness of Jesus’ gift. It is likely that not all this wine would be drunk at a wedding celebration. Jesus gave the newly-married couple a generous wedding gift – enough wine to last the couple until the next wine harvest.

But John has told us of this miracle to show how Jesus began using signs to reveal his glory. The miracle had a purpose for which the wedding was only a setting. It was a sign. A sign points to something. This sign provided a physical way to point to a spiritual truth, namely, the glory of the one and only Son of God. This act of turning water to wine proved Jesus’ divine authority and majesty.

Jesus’ first sign took place in the obscure village of Cana in Galilee. We might have expected him to begin in Jerusalem. At the time, this sign was meant primarily for his disciples. Apparently only they, the servants, and Jesus’ mother knew Jesus did it. We might have expected a huge crowd of witnesses led by important dignitaries of the day. Instead, without fanfare, Jesus did what God had set before him to do.

It worked. ***“He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.”*** They had new evidence that Jesus was the promised Messiah. They saw the glory of God, as John wrote about it earlier in his gospel, through his miracle. ***“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.”*** John 1:14. They believed more firmly in Jesus than they had before.

The disciples had already come to faith when they joined Jesus earlier. But now began the process of building up that faith, instructing it, and confirming it. The same thing happens for us today when we learn about Jesus’ signs, his miracles from his Word.

May we look at such miracles of Jesus and be reminded that he truly is the Son of God, our Savior. Amen.