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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
1/20/2013, The Second Sunday after Epiphany
Isaiah 62:1-5, John 2:1-11

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

...the steward of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, “Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now.” (John 2:9-10, RSV)

New Testament scholar N.T. Wright¹ explains that in those olden days, running out of wine at a wedding was a serious matter. He starts off his discussion of running out of wine by observing that the wedding in this morning’s story does not take place in Nazareth, which is our Lord’s hometown, but rather a neighboring village, Cana, where the disciple Nathanael comes from (John 21:2). And sure enough, I look at the map in the back of my Bible, and there they are: Nazareth and Cana are neighboring towns in Galilee. Bishop Wright, then, says this:

The wedding itself, in the town where Nathanael came from, would probably involve almost the whole village, and several people from the neighbouring ones too; which is why Mary, her son and his friends were invited. Running out of wine was not just inconvenient, but a social disaster and disgrace. The family would have to live with the shame of it for a long time to come; bride and groom might regard it as bringing bad luck on their married life.²

We can no doubt picture that. For years to come the husband and wife would think back to their wedding day, sigh, and say, “We sure wish we hadn’t run out of wine!”

But, glad to say, that did not happen. They did not have to think back to their wedding day and sigh, but rather they could recall with joy that that was the day when the ways of heaven intersected the ways of earth.

¹ This eminent scholar, N.T. Wright, is also a Bishop. He was bishop of Durham in the Church of England until his retirement in 2010.

² Tom Wright, *John for Everyone: Part One, Chapters 1-10* (Westminster John Knox Press 2002, 2004) page 22.

AND THE WORD WAS MADE FLESH

The great capstone over this beloved story of the wedding in Cana of Galilee comes from our Christmas Morning reading from St. John Chapter 1 — just the chapter before this morning’s reading. There we read about the Lord of heaven coming down to earth:

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John 1:14, RSV)

Now we see that when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, he brought his heavenly ways with him. Heaven is a happy place, with love reaching out in every direction. Heaven, then, is like a marriage feast, where people commence and celebrate the everlasting path of being true to one another, where there is no fussing or fighting, and where there is deep joy. At their best, our weddings on earth are a reflection of the heavenly banquet to come. So when this particular wedding in Cana of Galilee is on the verge of disappointment, since the wine is running out, Jesus steps forward to the rescue. He does a miracle. He arranges things so that they are on the heavenly side, with lots of good wine.

Bride and groom beheld his glory that day. Indeed all the happy folks at that wedding beheld something of the glory of the only Son from the Father.

STRANGE COMPASSION

Bishop Wright speaks of a “strange compassion” at work in this story.³ He means that compassion by which Jesus sees people in need and can hardly help himself from helping them.

But there is a cost to be paid for this compassion. Oh, there is a cost! In our reading, Jesus says to his mother, Mary, that his hour “has not yet come.” Mary simply responds by urging the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them. In the good old King James Version, her instruction goes this way:

⁵His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. (John 2:5, KJV)

I doubt that there can be a more beautiful exhortation to us than that: Whatsoever Jesus saith unto us to do, let us do it.

So, Jesus says to his mother that his hour has not yet come. But that hour does come. It comes in that night when Judas goes out to betray our Lord. Jesus

³ Ibid.

lets him go. He lingers and talks with his disciples and prays for them. Then, while Judas gathers a band of men and officers and directs them to the garden with lanterns and torches and weapons, Jesus speaks again of his hour:

¹These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour *is come*; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee: (John 17:1, KJV)

This compassion we see on display in the wedding at Cana is but one instance of that holy and grand compassion by which Jesus lays down his life for the life of the world. It involves a great price, but a price Jesus is willing to pay for you, for me.

TWO GREAT SAYINGS

This story of the wedding in Cana brings to my mind two great sayings. They are along the same line: their theme is transformation of life in the direction of holiness of life—not affirmation of life as it is, but transformation of life into something better. Both sayings speak of doing whatever Jesus tells us to do, and in the process, being transformed by our obedience to him. One saying comes from former pastor Raymond Schulze, the other from St. John Chrysostom.

Pastor Schulze's great saying comes from a wedding sermon in which the dear pastor encouraged the young couple before him to let it be with them as it was in that first wedding in Cana of Galilee. That is, he encouraged them to let Jesus be present in their marriage. You've probably heard me quote Pastor Schulze's saying before, I am so very fond of it. He said this:

We all know what an ordinary marriage is like. But I say to you, let Christ change the water of an ordinary marriage into the fine wine of an extraordinary marriage.

Such is the ministry of Jesus to us. When he comes to us, and we do not resist him, he comes to change us, to make us better, both better to our neighbors and better to ourselves. He comes to take an ordinary life and to make it into an extraordinary one.

The other saying is from Chrysostom. It also speaks of letting Jesus work a change in us. The saying goes this way:

At that time, then, Jesus made of water wine, and both then and now he ceases not to change our weak and unstable wills. For there are, yes, there are men who in nothing

differ from water, so cold, and weak, and unsettled. But let us bring those of such disposition to the Lord, that he may change their will to the quality of wine, so that they be no longer washy, but have body, and be the cause of gladness in themselves and others. (Chrysostom, Homily on John 2:1-11)

Who are these “washy” ones? Who are these watery ones? They are those who are too much addicted to this world and its way. Their addiction renders them soft and unreliable, as fickle as water trickling down a window pane. Their spouse cannot count on them, their children cannot count on them, their colleagues cannot count on them. Aye, they can hardly count on themselves any more, for their love of drinking or feasting or fancy clothes or fancy cars or sitting back and being at ease means that they too often fail to get up and do what needs to be done. And they have too few resources of strength and time and money and heart to be kind to others and to try to lead others to Christ.

The alternative is much better. The alternative is what Jesus wants for us: *abundant* life.

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10, KJV)

Jesus does not want us to live cold and thin and fickle lives, letting the years trickle away. No, he wants something better for us. He wants us to have abundant life.

Let us, then, do as Mary urges us. Let us do whatever Jesus saith until us to do. You have read the Bible, or much of it. You have heard the stories of the patriarchs, the apostles, the saints, and of Jesus himself. You know something of his spirit, of the Holy Spirit. So, let us put what we know into practice in our own lives. Indeed, let us follow him day by day—follow him all the way to heaven, through his grace and merits, and to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.