

Weddings tell a story

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Our text for this second Sunday after Epiphany is from the Gospel according to John in the second chapter:

This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and epiphanied His glory.¹

All weddings tell a story. From the details provided in our text, it seems however, that John the Evangelist is unaware of our current cultural norms. For nowadays wedding details are supposed to reflect the particular character of the couple getting married. Yet, John doesn't tell us if the wedding had a hipster modern theme or a country western one. He doesn't say if the bride wore a ball gown, an A-line or mermaid style dress. John doesn't tell us what kind of cake they had at the reception or if there was a heartwarming toast about the couple from the best man. John doesn't tell us about the bride and groom's first dance, their personal vows or what kind of flowers they used.

John doesn't tell us these things because, despite what some might think, marriage is not really the unique story of a given couple. Rather, to quote the apostle Paul,

Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.²

Christian weddings do tell a story – the story of Jesus Christ and His Bride the Church. With that truth in mind, today we review the story of the wedding at Cana paying close attention to the details and especially noting that in each detail we see a greater reality.

Turing to our text then, John begins the story by stating,

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee.³

This detail about the third day is significant. John could have written the next day, or Wednesday, or the day after that, but instead he wrote “the third day.” From the beginning, John wants us to see the connection between Christ's first sign and the resurrection. He also wants us to note that Jesus' first sign took place at a wedding. Anointed by John the Baptizer in the waters of the Jordan river, Jesus had begun His ministry of reconciliation. He had come to end the

¹ John 2:11.

² Ephesians 5:31-32

³ John 2:1.

divorce between husbands and wives, Jews and Gentiles, parents and children, and between God and man. Christ epiphanied Himself at a wedding to show the purpose of His coming. He was not at Cana simply for pleasure. He was never anywhere just for pleasure. He was there to serve, to fulfill the law, to endure temptation and to suffer for you. He was there to wed Himself once again to His erring bride the church.

So, John continues,

*When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."*⁴

On the surface this detail seems simple. Mary had noticed a problem and so she turned to Jesus to fix it. Perhaps she wanted Him to get more wine. After all, Jesus could have been responsible for the shortage because He brought His whole crew to the party. Or perhaps Mary wanted Jesus to rebuke all those drunkards who had blown through the wine even though there was still much partying to be had. John doesn't give us that detail though. He simply tells us that Mary wanted Jesus to do something.

In any case, Jesus responded to Mary rather directly:

*"Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."*⁵

In this detail John tells us that having heard Mary's statement our Lord had something very particular in mind. Just like He understands our prayers in ways that we might not perceive, in our text Jesus understood Mary's statement perhaps even more than she herself did. Whether or not she knew it, when Mary asked Jesus to do something and when she told the servants to do whatever Jesus said, what she really did was ask Jesus to take on the responsibility of the bridegroom. You see, in ancient times, that was the bridegroom's job – to supply food and wine for the feast. Jesus perceived that Mary had asked Him to reveal Himself as the Bridegroom.

By this detail John shows us that even though Jesus was not the one getting married that day in Cana, He had come to this earth for a wedding.

*"My hour has not yet come,"*⁶ He said.

Here, at a wedding on the third day, when the wine was spent, Christ spoke of the hour of His passion. Our Lord epiphanied Himself at a wedding in order to point us to His own wedding. Yet, His wedding story was not one of joy and drunkenness. His was one of parched lips and

⁴ John 2:3.

⁵ John 2:4.

⁶ John 2:4.

suffering. Christ's wedding was that of His own death through which sinners would be reconciled to God and the bride would once again be wed to the Bridegroom. That was the wedding Jesus had in mind and that is the wedding John would have us see in the details. The Bridegroom had come for His bride. Indeed, weddings, especially this one, tell us a story.

So John continues,

Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.⁷

Like the other details, these are not accidental. This was the third day. They were at a wedding with no wine. Christ's hour had not yet come. And these jars are important, too. You see, the Jews didn't use these jars for something prescribed in the Law of the Old Testament. Rather, the Jews used them for an extra-biblical, ceremonial washing. These jars were part of a man-made law created in an attempt to keep men from sinning.

Yet, the bride of Christ cannot cleanse herself through rabbinic traditions and phony laws made up by men. In fact, she cannot keep herself pure through any law, even the ones given by the Bridegroom Himself. Such attempts will only mislead her like the Pharisees into more self-righteousness and more impurity. Rather, God Himself must provide for her cleansing. So, there at Cana in Galilee Christ, gave wine from water and brought forth true purity and true cleansing. There, at Cana in Galilee, at the beginning of Jesus ministry, the purification of the Jews was replaced with a greater purification; and rites and customs gave way to grace and truth. There, at Cana in Galilee, Jesus provided wine in abundance as a sign that pointed to the hour when He would once again provide for His bride.

For on the cross, Christ would provide His very body for the sacrifice and His very blood for purification. And as the sleeping Adam, a type of Christ, once gave a rib from his own side for his bride, on the cross, Christ would sleep the sleep of death, rise on the third day, and so, from his pierced side give life to His bride the church. Weddings tell a story. This was the third day. They were at a wedding. There were jars for the Jewish rites of purification. And Christ's hour had not yet come.

Two more details. The first are these words from the master of the feast:

"Everyone serves the good wine first, and then when people have drunk freely, the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now."⁸

⁷ John 2:6.

⁸ John 2:10.

Jesus doesn't provide for His bride only after she first becomes clean from sin. Rather, in this detail, John tells us that Christ gave good wine even to those who had drunk freely. The word translated "drunk freely," literally means "intoxicated." At Cana in Galilee, Christ gave good wine to drunks. He did so because God's grace, like the undrinkable sum of about 150 gallons of water turned wine, never runs out. There is no amount of sin or impurity that the spilled blood of Jesus cannot cover.

And yes, like the master of the feast, this will lead some to anger. And sure, people will take this freedom as an excuse to continue in their sin. No doubt some at the wedding in Cana kept on drinking well past their limit. People will use the love of Jesus to try and justify all kinds of sins. Yet still, Jesus provides. He doesn't do so because His bride deserves it. In fact, the Law reveals that we sinners are the most hideous, unfaithful and impure brides who ever walked down the aisle. Yet, Christ provides for us because He loves us. The Bridegroom loves His bride. This is His loving nature, He gave wine to drunks and He gives grace to sinners.

The last detail then is perhaps the most important:

This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and epiphanied His glory.⁹

Our Lord's first sign was not just His first in chronology. The word used here is "arche," meaning, the archetype. The sign of water into wine is Christ's primary and chief sign that gives meaning to all the others. For at Cana in Galilee, Christ epiphanied Himself as the Bridegroom come to save His bride. At Cana in Galilee, Christ poured out His love on those who were far from deserving. On the third day, at a wedding, and when His hour had not yet come, Christ gave good wine, indeed –the very best wine. This is His glory and this is His epiphany: The Bridegroom loves His bride.

Weddings tell a story – indeed, a profound and mysterious story – the story of Jesus Christ and His unfathomable love for His bride the church. John has given us these details of the wedding at Cana so that we, like the disciples, might believe in our heavenly Bridegroom, and by believing, have life in Him. For by His death and resurrection Christ has taken you sinners as His own Bride. In the washing of water and the Word, the purifying of holy Absolution, and the nourishing of bread and wine, your Bridegroom unites Himself to you in one Body and one Life.

⁹ John 2:11.

All that He has He gives to you – His righteousness, His honor, His glory, and His kingdom. The two are now One Flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together let no one put asunder. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Second Sunday After Epiphany

Psalm 111, Exodus 33:12-23, Ephesians 5:22-33, John 2:1-11,

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