

Epiphany 2 / January 20, 2019

John 2:11

*“This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested His glory. And His disciples believed in Him.”*

Weddings, gifts and banquets are three of a kind. Weddings have been part of human life among every people, from the smallest tribe and clan to the largest, most advanced civilization. The union of man and women is enshrined in the act of creation. Following the creation of the woman the Lord says, *“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”* Jesus affirmed the sacredness of marriage, saying to His disciples in Matthew chapter 19, *“What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate.”* The practice of giving gifts on the occasion of a marriage is doubtless also of ancient origin and practiced by peoples throughout the world. It is a way of blessing a couple’s happiness and also a means of providing newly-weds with material resources as they begin their new life together. A marriage is the perfect occasion for a dinner and a dance. I don’t know if ancient Israelites danced, but they certainly celebrated marriages with a wedding banquet. Such was the case in Cana of Galilee when Jesus, His mother and disciples came as invited guests of a young couple to celebrate their marriage vows.

I am unfamiliar with the gift giving practices of Jews in the first century. The text doesn’t say what, if any gifts, the guests brought to the wedding remembered in our gospel. Although, it’s safe to say they didn’t get two matching sets of dinner ware. Cana was a small village. Its inhabitants weren’t wealthy; gifts would have been modest. Taxes were high in the region of the Sea of Galilee, they were collected by dishonest officials and enforced by Roman soldiers, eager for some extra cash to augment their own meagre salaries. It wasn’t a happy time or a prosperous place, which made an event like a wedding banquet even more important. In the midst of the merry making, Jesus’ mother noticed the wine was running out and would soon be gone. She realized this would be an embarrassment for the couple and a big disappointment for family and friends gathered to celebrate. She told Jesus, who didn’t seem to respond

enthusiastically at first. He said, *“Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come?”* Nevertheless, He eventually provided them with enough wine to keep the celebration going and for a long time too! He made 180 gallons of wine at the most and 120 gallons at the least. For those who don’t remember the imperial measures that’s 680 litres or 454 litres. Either way that’s a lot of wine!

It was a gift for them in time that gives a gift of eternal life for all who see beyond the wine and see the glory of God in Jesus. Through this sign Jesus revealed His glory, so people would put their faith in Him and receive a gift of life that would last forever. This was the first sign Jesus gave of His glory. In the opening verses of this gospel, John tells us the reason Jesus revealed His glory and the blessing received by all who receive Him. He wrote, *“He came to His own, and His own people did not receive Him. But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God.”* The Lord gives many signs of His presence in our lives, some we notice and others may happen without our being aware. The Lord does all these things so that we would see His glory, put our faith in Him and receive a gift of forgiveness and life that lasts forever.

Jesus gave a gift to that unknown couple to help them out of a jam on the most important day of their lives. They may not even have noticed! John says the master of the banquet complimented the groom, saying, *“Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.”* It was a great gift, but Jesus gave a much more important gift to His disciples, the gift of faith. They saw His glory and believed in Him. We all like to receive material blessings, but the most important blessings are of the Spirit, they last forever. The wine Jesus made was only for that time. Even if someone hid a few bottles in a cave in the desert and forgot them, by now the wine would be gone. Jesus made a lot of wine, but when it was consumed it was gone. The spiritual blessing lasts much longer. The spiritual blessing is to see Him as the Son of God, our Saviour and Lord, who has come help us out of the greatest jam; bondage to sin, temptation by the devil and eternal death. In time the wine again ran dry. The blessing

of faith in Jesus never runs dry, for it is nourished by the Spirit of God and wells up to eternal life.

Jesus gave many signs of His glory, so people would put their faith in Him. The signs He gave revealed His glory as our God and Saviour and also showed His concern for human beings in every aspect of life in this world in bondage to sin and under the condemnation of death. Jesus healed people of leprosy, which allowed them to return to human society and the fellowship of family and friends. Jesus healed people who were disabled, so they could enter the temple and worship God with the larger community. Jesus raised the dead and reunited people separated by death. He transformed water into wine, to help a couple out of a socially embarrassing situation and get their marriage started on a good note. Running out of wine was hardly a life and death situation on par with healing the sick and raising the dead. If Jesus had saved His first sign for a different time and place, people may have grouched and complained, but it wouldn't have been the end of the world. But, it would have been a social catastrophe for the couple. They would have forever been remembered as the ones who didn't buy enough wine for their banquet. Jesus revealed His glory in such a way that it brought blessings in time as well as for eternity. Jesus is concerned for our lives, from our smallest wants to our greatest needs. He is God with us in our lives in time and to eternity.

The first sign Jesus gave at a wedding in Cana in Galilee was noticed by just a few people; the disciples, Jesus' mother and the servants who had drawn the water. It was similar to another sign that Jesus would give four chapters later, when He fed a crowd of more than five thousand with five loaves of bread and two fish, leaving twelve baskets of leftovers. What was different was that on that occasion people noticed and took action! The result of that miracle was a near riot, as the people upon realizing what had happened, rushed towards Jesus intent on making Him their king by force. They saw the sign, but they missed the meaning. They believed something about Jesus, but what they believed was wrong! They believed Jesus was their king after the manner of the world. However, Jesus' kingdom is not of this earth and so He quietly withdrew His presence

and waited until the crowd dispersed and He joined the disciples on the other side of the Sea of Galilee.

The problem with signs is that without the word to explain, they are open to misinterpretation and misunderstanding. If the people at the wedding in Cana of Galilee had realized the miracle by which the water had become wine, they may have responded in a similar fashion. The disciples responded to the sign with faith, because John the Baptist had previously told them that Jesus was the Messiah, the Saviour of the world. In the previous chapter John said of Jesus, *“Behold, The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of world.”* When they saw the sign they understood the word! Jesus revealed His glory by changing the water into wine, by healing the sick and raising the dead, so we would remember the words that speak of him as Saviour and, so that we would look to Him to meet our greatest spiritual needs; forgiveness, faith, the Holy Spirit and eternal life.

If asked their top ten needs of daily life, most people probably wouldn't even mention forgiveness, faith, the Holy Spirit or eternal life. Instead, people would list things related to their physical wants and desires; a new vehicle, a bigger house, a vacation, a bottle of rare wine from the region of Cana, vintage date unknown. Even if the liquid was gone and all that remained was a hard residue, a bottle of that wine would fetch a fortune on the auction block, if for no other reason that it's great antiquity. The things of the Spirit have value to some people, but most people want things that will bring worldly value to their lives in time. But as Jesus said, *“What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world, but loses his soul?”*

Nevertheless, I bet that was good wine! No batch of wine could compare with the wine Jesus made. Jesus probably ruined wine for those people, because after they tasted His wine, every other wine would have been flat and stale in comparison. If they had known Jesus had made that last batch of wine, they probably would have tried to make Him their king by force too, so He could make more! But Jesus knew they needed something more than another bottle of wine; even as the people on the shore of the Sea of Galilee needed something more than another meal of fish and bread sticks. They needed forgiveness of sins and life with God through faith in His name. To all of us who naturally put more value on our physical

needs than our spiritual needs Jesus says, *“Do not labour for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.”* The food that the Son of Man gives us is His body broken on the cross and His blood, shed for the forgiveness of sin. The food that the Son of Many gives us is His word by which our faith is nurtured and given growth. The food that the Son of Man gives us is His body and blood received under the forms of bread and wine for the forgiveness of sin. Through His word and in His sacraments, Jesus continues to reveal His glory, so we would believe in Him as our Saviour and have life in His name.

We need the nourishment of food and drink to sustain us in time, but we have an even greater need for the spiritual nourishment that Jesus gives us; faith, forgiveness, the Holy Spirit and eternal life. Jesus is the bread and wine of life, whoever comes to Him will have their hunger satisfied and their thirst slaked for time and eternity. Jesus will again provide the blessing of fine wine. When He returns He will create all things new and give all believers a share in His resurrection and a place at the feast in His kingdom. We remember this each time we share in His Holy Communion. He told the disciples, *“Truly I say to you I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom.”* Then will be fulfilled the words the Holy Spirit spoke through Isaiah, saying, *“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine...He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces...”* The Lord bless us with faith to see our Saviour’s glory in His word and in the sacraments and through them, open our hearts to trust in Him always as our Saviour and Lord. In Jesus’ Name. Amen