

Second Weekend After Epiphany (RCL/C): "Wine Into Water and Much More"

Isaiah 62:1-5, John 2:1-11

January 18-29, 2025

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

What's the difference between "We just celebrated Epiphany" and "I've had an epiphany"?

We **celebrate** Epiphany on January 6, remembering the coming of the magi, the astronomers who followed a star to find and worship Jesus, the King of Israel. If I **have** an epiphany, I've experienced a revelation; I've come to an important realization; the Holy Spirit has shown me something I've never **seen** before, even if I've been **staring** at it for a long time. Maybe I have an epiphany that I'm miserable because I'm in the wrong line of work. This isn't what I'm meant to be doing. I'm bored. I have no energy for this. I am **not** fulfilled and don't want to spend my life in a career I hate. I need to make a radical change, follow a new path." Now **that's** a revelation. That's a God-given **epiphany**, a *manifestation*, a *showing forth*, a "Here, it's in your face, do you see it??"

There are some epiphanies we share in common. Hopefully we mature over time, and in our early twenties realize our parents aren't as dumb as we assumed they were during our teen years. If we're fortunate, we even have the epiphany that our parents aren't just smarter than we thought; they're actually pretty wise, and still have a lot to teach us, if we're willing to learn.

Or the epiphany may be, "I don't just **like**, I **love** this person I'm dating, and hope to marry him or her, and spend our lives together." If two people have the same epiphany, engagement and marriage may follow.

Speaking of marriage: a **wedding** is at the heart of our Gospel this weekend: the wedding at Cana in Galilee. St. John is the only one of the 4 evangelists who tells us this wonderful, at times puzzling story. Lemme just say Cana is **not** close to Capernaum, which was homebase for Jesus and His disciples early on in His public ministry. I googled it, and drive time between Cana and Capernaum isn't bad, just over half an hour. But Jesus, His mom and friends obviously didn't have that option; the journey on foot would have taken them 8 hours, a full day in each direction.

Scripture doesn't tell us who the bride and groom were. But we always want to fill in the blanks of a story, so a legend grew up that the groom was John (as in James & John, "sons of thunder," sons of Zebedee). Further, the legend claimed that the groom, John, was the nephew of the mother of Jesus, which would have made Jesus and John cousins, which sounds a lot like confusion with John the Baptist, whom St. Luke says was Jesus' cousin! Maybe those who came up with that non-biblical story wanted to explain why Jesus, His mother and disciples were on the wedding guest list, and/or why Jesus' mother would have felt compelled to be **sure** her son knew that the wine had run out.

'Seems like an odd thing to focus on, right? Why should the bar running dry be reason to panic? Well, on a practical level, wedding feasts in those days ran for a full week. Families saved up for years to put out a spread lasting that long. Wine was a big deal, because it wasn't usually within reach of the poor. But weddings and wine were expected to go together, so the social standing of the host family was on the line to keep it flowing. Some Scripture scholars say the mother of Jesus felt compassion and concern for the host family's reputation.

But there's a much bigger picture for us to see. There's more at stake than the Yelp reviews of the folks attending the reception. This wedding in Cana becomes the stage for the first *sign* that Jesus performs in the Fourth Gospel. More important than avoiding embarrassment for the bride and groom and families, Jesus is **showing forth, manifesting, revealing** His messianic power, "*the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.*" (John 1:14c-d) There's no Transfiguration scene in John's Gospel, no account of Jesus taking Peter, James and John to the mountaintop and being transformed in front of them, His clothing bright as the sun. No, but in each one of the signs He performs, His power and glory are radiant, "like shining from shook foil," as Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote in his poem, "God's Grandeur."

Signs like turning water into wine, multiplying 5 loaves and 2 fish to feed 5,000 men, plus women and children, giving sight to the man born blind, raising Lazarus back to life from the dead, **look** like

miracles, except that these are miracles that require eyes of faith to recognize, and that end up increasing faith. Bottom line: if you've got a **little** faith to recognize that what's happened is extraordinary, then you'll end up with a lot **more** faith. Changing water into wine is meant to change the lives of those who see and believe.

So here's a question for us: do we recognize when God has turned water into wine in our lives, or do we chalk it up to good luck, random accident, or maybe miss it altogether, because we head home once the wine runs out? Do we consciously look for God's fingerprints on events, or do we take everything that happens at surface level and miss God's epiphany? Sometimes we don't see what we don't **expect** to see. So let's ask the Holy Spirit to gift us with eyes of faith to recognize God at work all around us, all the time.

The wedding here is symbolic of the messianic banquet and the wine is symbolic of the **joy** that belongs to that occasion. So the subtext of this story is: the promised Messiah has arrived, so celebrate! As Churchill may have said, "This isn't the beginning of the end, but it is the end of the beginning," if the beginning was the long wait between the promise of a messiah and the fulfillment of that promise.

We're only in the 2nd chapter of St. John's Gospel, and there's much more of the story to come, including suffering along the way **to** the cross, and along the Way **of** the Cross. So the words of Jesus' mother to the wedding servers, "*Do whatever he tells you*" (John 2:5b), will hopefully be remembered by the disciples on the journey to Jerusalem, to Calvary, to our Lord's resurrection, ascension, and beyond. These are words for us to hold close to our hearts, as I often preach in wedding homilies: "*Do whatever he tells you.*" What He tells us is to love God above all else and to love our neighbors as ourselves, no exceptions.

"Joy is the most infallible sign of the presence of God" is a quote I've seen attributed to more than 1 person. When I'm asked to give the blessing at a wedding reception, I often pray: "Dear Lord, as You gladdened the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee with Your presence, so bring Your joy to this

celebration....” The presence of Christ sets the stage for joy in any setting, at any moment. St. Luke tells us that Jesus taught about the importance of welcoming **all** to **any** gathering we host, of which He is to be a part. He specifically mentions “*the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind*” (Luke 14:13), the folks other people surely would leave off the list as undesirable and undeserving. Dietrich Bonhoeffer echoed St. Luke when he wrote: “The exclusion of the weak and insignificant, the seemingly useless people, from a Christian community may actually mean the exclusion of Christ; in the poor brother, Christ is knocking at the door.”

One of the invitations offered to the congregation to come forward and receive the Lord’s Supper is, “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” The Eucharist we celebrate is a foretaste of the feast to come, a nibble and sip of glory pointing us towards the future messianic banquet, of which the guests at the wedding in Cana had a glimpse, even unknowingly. We have a glimpse, too – if we have the eyes of faith to recognize the signs all around us of water turned into wine, and in this case of our Lord Jesus’ Body and Blood coming to us in, with and under blessed bread and wine. We feast on Word & Sacrament, and then we go forth into the mission field of the world to “Do whatever He tells us,” even when it runs counter to prevailing winds. Through the eyes of faith, may we have the daily epiphany, the clear vision to see the image of God in every human being, treating them with the holy reverence and God-inspired compassion Jesus expects and commands. To exclude them is to exclude Christ and to forfeit joy. Amen

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