

JESUS GIVES US SIGNS THAT REVEAL HIM AS OUR SALVATION

Sermon for 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany, 2019

John 2:1-11

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is the Gospel from before, John 2:1-11: ¹ **On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.** ² **Jesus and His disciples had also been invited to the wedding.** ³ **When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother told Him, "They have no more wine."**

⁴ **Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come."**

⁵ **His mother told the servants, "Do whatever He tells you!"**

⁶ **Six stone water-jars were standing there, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing. Each jar held between eighty and one hundred and eighteen litres.** ⁷ **Jesus told the servants, "Fill the water-pots with water!" They filled them up to the top.** ⁸ **Then He told them, "Now dip some of it out and take it to the manager of the dinner!"**

Then they took it to him. ⁹ **When the manager of the dinner had tasted the water that had been turned into wine and did not know where it had come from, although the servants who had dipped the water out knew, the manager called the bridegroom.** ¹⁰ **He told him, "Everybody else serves his good wine first and, when people have had plenty to drink, then the inferior wine. You have kept the best wine until now."**

¹¹ **Jesus performed this, as the first of His miraculous signs, at Cana in Galilee. He showed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

From last Sunday, remember how we said that Epiphany means "manifestation," a revealing of something that lay hidden. So, during this season of Epiphany, we consider the things that *God has shown to His people*.

Last Sunday, at the baptism of Jesus, we saw heaven opened, with the Holy Spirit coming down on Jesus in bodily form like a dove. Then a voice came from heaven, which said, "*You are My Son, whom I love. I am well pleased with You.*"¹ This bodily manifestation of the Holy Spirit and the voice from heaven truly revealed that Jesus is the Son of God.

Today, at the **wedding in Cana of Galilee**, we find the Lord manifesting *Himself*, that is, revealing Himself to be Immanuel, God with us,² who has come to restore His creation. In this restoration, we become new creations with new names given by the mouth of the Lord, wherein He makes us to be *a splendid crown* in His hand.³

Often, the account of Jesus at the wedding in Cana is used as an example of the high place Jesus gives to the sanctity of marriage, or how He often gives much more than we sinners either desire or deserve. While it is true that Jesus does honour marriage - after all, He is the One who instituted and sanctified marriage - and while it is also true that Jesus gives to all His creation, both the evil and the good, much more than they deserve - after all, He gives us life and salvation when what we really deserve is death and condemnation - John does not tell this story of Jesus at the wedding feast for those reasons. No, John relates what happened that day for one purpose and one purpose alone. Towards the end of his gospel he says, "*However, these things have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, by believing, you may have life in His name,*" (John 20:31). That is to say, the wedding in Cana is one of those moments when Jesus gives us signs that reveal Him as our Salvation.

In regard to this miracle at Cana, John tells us, "**Jesus performed this, as the first of His miraculous signs, at Cana in Galilee. He showed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.**"

Often, we think of signs as symbols, or something that *symbolically* stands in the place of something else. For John, this is not the case. For him, the word "sign" really means something that points to, or is somehow linked with, something else. Quite literally, the Greek word that we translate as "sign" here means "mystery." In the same way,

¹ Luke 3:22

² Matthew 1:23

³ Isaiah 62:3

“mystery” in Latin is translated as “sacrament.” A sacrament is a mystery, and a mystery is a sign that points to something or reveals something hidden from ordinary sight. For example, take holy baptism. We only see water and hear the Word, yet through the pouring of this water, together with God’s Word, all sins are washed away. Unlike Jesus’ baptism, where the Holy Spirit descended in bodily form, we do not see this happening, yet the Holy Spirit does descend upon the one being baptised, making him a member of God’s family. That is a mystery. Again, think of the Lord’s Supper. We see, touch, and taste only bread and wine, yet the consecrated elements *are* Christ’s true body and blood. That too, is a mystery to us.

Through baptism and the Lord’s Supper, we are linked to Christ’s death and resurrection. The sacraments point to Jesus because they are inextricably linked to Jesus. They are signs of Christ Jesus’ real bodily presence among us as Creator and Redeemer. In these signs we experience the death Jesus died to give us life.

This does not mean that *every time* Jesus performs a miracle, we have a new sacrament. No, Jesus’ miracles are sacramental in nature. They are **miraculous signs** that point to Him and reveal Him as the Son of God. They point to the spiritual truth of the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One who took on our flesh, lived among us, and experienced everything that we experience. They reveal Jesus, who, while fully human and like us in every way, except without sin, is also fully God. These miracles are signs, visible manifestations that reveal Jesus for who He really is, namely, *the Word made flesh*, who created all things and who upholds all things in Himself. They reveal the glory of the one and only Son of God, Jesus Christ.

This is how Jesus has chosen to reveal Himself to us and to come to us, in signs in which His Word resides. But there is a problem. The problem is not in the signs. The problem is that these are not the signs that we would choose.

We are an evil and adulterous generation, which seeks after all kinds of signs, just not the signs that Jesus has given to us. Therefore, we would seek Jesus in *heartfelt emotions*, which lift us to heaven so that *we might feel His presence*, while we despise His real presence in water, Word, bread, and wine. We pray for signs from God instead of relying on the signs He has already provided. We are afraid that Jesus will not do what He has promised unless we see or experience some sort of miraculous sign.

Because of that fear, because we can’t find comfort in what Jesus has already given, we often seek Jesus in the Law. John says, **“Six stone water-jars were standing there, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing. Each jar held between eighty and one hundred and eighteen litres.** Like those six stone water-jars, the Law is empty. It cannot save; it can only accuse and destroy. We have drunk this inferior wine to the dregs, and still we are not satisfied. The jars are empty, and all we find is pain, despair, sickness, and death.

But Jesus has come to fulfil the Law. Just as there were six jars to be filled, so Jesus on the sixth day of the week fulfilled all the Law and the Prophets. Just as man was created on the sixth day, so the Creator re-creates His creation on the sixth day with His holy body and blood. On the sixth day, Jesus died on His cross and was placed in His grave. It is finished. His hour had come.

Still, that is not the end of the story. The One who has died is no longer dead; He lives! The new and greater Jonah, after spending three days in the belly of the earth, gives us His greatest sign. The grave is empty. He is not there. Jesus lives! He has filled the Law to the brim, and our cup runs over. Of the six empty stone water-jars, Jesus says, **“Fill the water-pots with water!” They filled them up to the top.** ⁸ **Then He told them, “Now dip some of it out and take it to the manager of the dinner!” Then they took it to him.** ⁹ **When the manager of the dinner had tasted the water that had been turned into wine and did not know where it had come from, although the servants who had dipped the water out knew, the manager called the bridegroom.** ¹⁰ **He told him, “Everybody else serves his good wine first and, when people have had plenty to drink, then the inferior wine. You have kept the best wine until now.”**

Jesus replaces the Law and the old covenant with a new and better wine. We are not purified by the Law, but by His blood. The risen body of Christ is the beginning of the new order of things. In Him and through Him, creation is renewed and revitalised. Although this renewal is perceived now only by faith, we see signs of it in the miracles and the Sacraments Jesus has given to us.

Jesus continues to provide, as He does this day, signs that point to Him. He has provided to us mysteries in the holy Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. There, Jesus is hidden in lowly water and simple bread and wine. In

these miracles, He is revealed to us. In the Sacraments, Jesus, who revealed at Cana that He is Lord of the elements, continues to reveal Himself as Lord over all creation.

In the waters of Baptism, Jesus makes us His own. It is not that the waters of Baptism are nobler than plain water; in fact, they are plain water, except that Jesus has added His Word and commandment to it. As He turned the water into wine, with His Word and by His command, He has also given water the power to redeem. For it is written, “*Baptism... now saves you,*” (1 Peter 3:21). Baptism is a “*washing of regeneration,*” (Titus 3:5). Baptism is a re-creation of that which was dead in sin. Baptism re-creates us in newness of life in Christ Jesus.

In the same manner, the Lord’s Supper is a sign of our redemption in Jesus Christ. The Scriptures tell us that the blood of Jesus cleanses us from sin.⁴ The miracle of Jesus’ true body and true blood under the elements of bread and wine reveals the mystery of our salvation in a blessed and holy sacramental union with Jesus. It is as though Jesus takes us as His bride and the two become one flesh.

On that day at the wedding celebration in Cana, our Lord revealed who He is to us and to the world. In this, **the first of His miraculous signs**, Jesus points us to the restoration of creation that He would accomplish on the great third day, Easter morning. Through His first miracle, indeed, through all His miracles, Jesus manifested His glory and revealed to us a foretaste of what was to come: the restoration of our life in our God as it is meant to be.

Jesus has given a sign. At Cana, at Calvary, in the font, and on the altar, Jesus gives a sign of His glory, and His glory revealed is also a sign: a sign of His love for us. At Cana, in the font, and on the altar, our Lord has given us signs of the renewed creation won for us on the cross at Calvary. Jesus reveals that His life and death is for us. Amen.

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

PRAYER FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

Almighty and ever-living God, You have given the light of Your truth in Jesus Christ that we may be rescued from the darkness of sin and unbelief, and have life in His name. We thank You that You have made us alive through faith in Him, and lavished on us so many gifts of Your grace. Grant that we may treasure in our hearts the truth that Jesus, Your unique Son, is our revealer of Your will, our sacrificial Lamb, our Messiah, our King, and the Son of Man, who was rejected, crucified, and rose again for us.

Heavenly Father, make us who are Your people shining lights in this world’s darkness. Send out preachers and teachers of Your Word, that many more may know Your mercy and love in the gift of Your Son and His Gospel of grace and forgiveness. Strengthen all of us in the fellowship of Your Church to join hands in love and zeal to do the work set before us. We praise you for Your various spiritual gifts. Grant that we may use them for the common good of the members of Christ’s body. Make us loyal in serving our Lord, patient in every trouble, and joyful in our promised hope. Make us eager to hold on to what is good, to help our fellow Christians, and be ready to share with all people in need. Free us from the deceptive designs of Satan and every kind of falsehood, and give us the ability to distinguish false spirits. Grant that we who have been called out of darkness into Christ’s marvellous light may in this way proclaim His saving love and power.

Bestow a special measure of Your grace on our homes.

Give stability, peace, and tranquillity to the nations of the earth. Deliver people everywhere from famine, disease, fire, flood, storm, earthquake, and every danger. In every test that You send, help all people to lift up their eyes to You, and to know Your power and care. If it is Your gracious will, please send rain to water the earth.

We ask Your mercy on all who are in any special need of body or soul. Show them the comfort of Your love; give them hope instead of despair, joy and gladness instead of grief, and a song of praise instead of sorrow.

Save us all from the dangers that surround us. Defend us, in body and soul, until that moment when we see the ascending and descending angels linking earth and heaven permanently, when You call us from this life to live in Your presence for ever. All this we ask in the name of Jesus, Your Son. Amen.

⁴ 1 John 1:7

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Isaiah 62:1-5

¹ For Zion's sake I shall not keep silent and for Jerusalem's sake I shall not remain quiet until her righteousness goes forth like a bright light and her salvation burns brightly like a torch. ² The nations will see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory. You will be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD will designate. ³ Then you will be a splendid crown in the hand of the LORD and a royal headband in the palm of your God. ⁴ You will not be called "Deserted" any longer, and your land will not be called "Desolation" any longer but you will be named "Hephzibah," and your land will be named "Beulah." For the LORD delights in you, and your land will be married. ⁵ For, as a young man marries a maiden, so your sons will marry you, and your God will rejoice over you as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

¹ Now concerning spiritual gifts, fellow-Christians, I do not want you to be ignorant. ² You know that you were Gentiles and were drawn away to dumb idols, however you happened to be led. ³ Therefore, I tell you that no one who is speaking by God's Spirit says, "Cursed be Jesus," and no one can say, "Jesus is the Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ There are different kinds of charismatic gifts but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are differing ways of serving but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of activities but the same God, who works everything in all of them.

⁷ Now the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the common good. ⁸ For to one there is given through the Spirit the Word of wisdom, to another the Word of knowledge through the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another charismatic gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues and to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ One and the same Spirit works all these things and distributes them to each one individually, as He determines.

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