

“Recipients of God’s Glory”

John 2:1-11, Epiphany 2-C, January 15, 2016

Weddings! Oh those glorious weddings! Not always, but quite often these days, there is so much careful thought, time and money that goes into planning the “perfect” wedding! Yet, people in the know; people like **florists, caterers, professional wedding directors, mothers of the bride, musicians** and parish pastors—all know—that in spite of all the careful planning, something invariably will always still go wrong when the big day arrives!

Sometimes the groom is changing into his tuxedo at the church, 30 minutes before the wedding begins, when suddenly he discovers that the **pants to his tuxedo are 7 inches too long!** Or perhaps, the **acolyte**, who has just finished lighting those 14 candles beautifully arrayed in each of those two special candelabras up front, also ends up *accidentally* lighting the UNITY CANDLE also; though the lighting of unity candle is supposed to be reserved exclusively for the bride and the groom to light **simultaneously, once they have spoken their marriage vows!**

YOU SEE, DEAR FRIENDS, IT IS NOT REALLY A MATTER OF “IF” SOMETHING GOES WRONG, BUT WHAT WILL IT BE! And apparently, in the words of our Gospel lesson today, we can see how something went terribly wrong at that particular wedding feast in Cana also, where no one less than JESUS’ OWN MOTHER—MARY WAS PROBABLY SERVING AS THE DIRECTOR OF THAT WEDDING TO WHICH Jesus and his disciples had been invited too!

Friends, WE DON’T KNOW EXACTLY WHOSE WEDDING IT WAS, though there are some Bible commentators who have speculated that this might have been the Apostle John’s own wedding, since in writing his Gospel account he sometimes shares some PERSONAL EPISODES ABOUT HIS OWN LIFE; noting that he always does so in a spirit of TRUE HUMILITY, preferring to write about himself anonymously in the 3rd person rather than in the 1st person. He does this to keep the reader’s primary attention focused primarily on Jesus rather than on himself!

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, JESUS AND HIS MOTHER WERE ATTENDING THIS WEDDING FEAST WHEN SUDDENLY THE WINE SUPPLY AVAILABLE TO THE INVITED GUESTS COMPLETELY RAN OUT! **This is when Jesus’ mother came to Jesus and said, “THEY HAVE NO WINE” (JOHN 2:4)!**

Jesus certainly knew his Mother well enough to know what she was asking him to do. Nevertheless, he replied: *“WOMAN WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH ME? MY HOUR HAS NOT YET COME” (JOHN 2:4)!*

And Mary must have GIVEN HER SON THAT LOOK THAT ONLY A MOTHER CAN GIVE, that look of a mother that usually overrules all of her son’s filial objections. That’s when she next turns to the servants and says to them: *“DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU” (JOHN 2:5)!*

So first Jesus QUIETLY tells the servants present there that day to fill those six large stone jars with water; those SIX 20 TO 30 GALLON STONE JARS THAT WERE OBVIOUSLY PUT THERE FOR THE JEWISH RITES OF PURIFICATION. Then secondly, Jesus tells these servants: *“NOW DRAW SOME OUT AND TAKE IT TO THE MASTER OF THE FEAST!”*

St. John tells us: ***So they took it. When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, ‘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!’***

This is when St. John then concludes this whole episode with a great theological observation on his part: *“This is the first of his signs Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him”* (v. 11)!

1. FIRST OF ALL, JESUS’ GLORY IS REVEALED TO US IN HIS TIMING.

In response to Mary’s personal attempt to get Jesus to somehow intervene and to do something about this rather sad and unfortunate situation, Jesus initial answer to her was: *“WOMAN WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH ME”* (JOHN 2:4).

Of course, there has been much discussion generated OVER THE CENTURIES concerning the FORM OF ADDRESS that Jesus GAVE to his dear Mother INITIALLY at this particular event! He refers to her not as “Mother,” but as “Woman.” And it is quite possible that in using this particular terminology, that JESUS IS NOW BEGINNING TO DISTANCE HIMSELF SOMEWHAT, METAPHORICALLY SPEAKING, FROM HIS MOTHER and to shift his primary loyalty to his Heavenly Father instead, now that he had been baptized and the Father in Heaven had spoken his great blessing upon Jesus that we heard last Sunday: *“YOU ARE MY BELOVED SON! WITH YOU I AM WELL-PLEASSED”* (LUKE 3:22)!

It’s worth noting that every time Jesus addresses his Mother in John’s Gospel that he addresses her as **“WOMAN”** rather than addressing her as “Mother.” Many of us remember that this is the 3rd Sentence that Jesus spoke from the cross! Looking at her he said with respect to John: *“WOMAN BEHOLD YOUR SON!”* And to the disciples he said, *“BEHOLD YOUR MOTHER”* (JOHN 19:26-27)!

Yes, our Lord is still Mary’s Son, but he is Mary’s Son who would say to others from this day forward: *“THE WORDS THAT I SPEAK TO YOU ARE NOT MY WORDS, BUT THE WORDS OF HIM WHO SENT ME! I HAVE NOT COME TO DO MY WILL BUT THE WILL OF HIM WHO SENT ME!”* (JOHN 6:38; JOHN 7:16)

Jesus speaks to her about his **“hour,”** saying, **“My hour has not yet come!”** (v. 4) he is talking to her first and foremost about the hour of his death.

In chapter 7, the crowd **“tried to seize him,”** John tells us, **“but no one laid a hand on him, because his hour had not yet come!”** The same thing happens again in chapter 8. And it’s not until chapter 12, at the beginning of that first Holy Week, that Jesus does finally announce: **“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified,”** and does so again in chapter 13, when our Lord is gathered together with his disciples in the Upper Room in Jerusalem that first Maundy Thursday: **“Jesus, knowing that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end...”**

The point Jesus is making when he distances himself, metaphorically speaking, from his mother and her request is this: *“I have a plan; a plan that my Heavenly Father has given me. I am not under your authority, but under His authority. I am working to fulfil his agenda, not your agenda. In short, I am not ready to reveal myself publicly to the world, just yet!”* And so Jesus doesn’t! At this point Jesus is working very quietly behind the scenes in the lives of other people!

This is to Jesus’ glory, showing the world the greatest expression of God’s love that the world has ever seen—giving his only-begotten Son into death on the cross in payment of our sins, and three days later raising him from the dead to assure us that God the Heavenly Father has accepted the sacrifice our Savior has made on our behalf!

We become the recipient of God’s glory through Jesus still today when God reveals to us through his HOLY WORD and BLESSED SACRAMENTS, that he didn’t come among us only to

perform a few miracles, or even to give us some very profound teachings---both of which he does do. BUT GOD'S GLORY IS MANIFEST TO THE WORLD CHIEFLY AMONG US THROUGH JESUS – WHEN HE EVENTUALLY DOES DIE ON THE CROSS TO BRING US THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS—at just the right time, and to die there NOT ONLY OUR SINS but for the SINS OF THE WORLD.

ANY UNDERSTANDING OF JESUS THAT DOESN'T EMPHASIZE HIS SACRIFICIAL DEATH-----ENTIRELY MISSES THE POINT OF HIS WHOLE LIFE AND MINISTRY.

WE WILL NEVER KNOW HIM PERSONALLY THE WAY THAT HIS HEAVENLY FATHER LONGS US TO KNOW HIM PERSONALLY UNTIL WE LEARN TO MAKE A PROPER ESTIMATION OF HIS DEATH! We will never fully see God's glory revealed in Jesus to the world and us, unless we see it is his death!

God's glory is revealed in Jesus “**AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME**” when he will lay down his life for sinners. In other words, Jesus was constantly living out his life in this world with his own future death constantly **UPON HIS MIND**. Although Jesus was declining to reveal his glory publicly to everyone present there at the Wedding Feast of Cana at this point, **HE STILL WAS WILLING TO DO SOMETHING TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THESE PEOPLES' LIVES**. And Mary demonstrates her faith in her Son when she instructs the servants present: “*Do whatever he tells you!*”

2. SECONDLY, WE CAN SEE THAT JESUS' GLORY IS REVEALED TO US IN THIS WONDERFUL TRANSFORMATION THAT THEN TAKES PLACE IN HIS CHANGING THE WATER INTO WINE.

Wine in the Old Testament is overwhelmingly a symbol of joy and blessing. In **PSALM 104:15**, we read: “*Wine gladdens the hearts of people!*” And in **PROVERBS 3:9**, we read: “*Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with the new wine!*” The heart of this sign is a **TRANSFORMATION**: water changed; that is, water transformed into wine. But remember that when John communicates these great stories about **Jesus' life and ministry to us that he is most always SPEAKING TO US ON TWO DIFFERENT LEVELS at the same time**. On one level he is speaking to us about a physical reality, but on the other level he is speaking to us about a spiritual reality. -- **HERE JOHN IS REMINDING US THAT JESUS HAS THE POWER TO CHANGE OUR SOMETIMES DRAB AND DREARY LIVES INTO WHAT CAN ALSO BECOME BRIGHT AND SPARKING LIVES!**

Even at a joyous event like a wedding feast, the **Old Testament Levitical law required devout Jewish people to participate in some type of spiritual washing ritual, to remind them in no uncertain way that they were all sinners in need of God's cleansing and purification**. But Jesus takes these stone jars and the water that they contained—to become an outward symbol of the **GRACE** he would give to human beings through his perfect life, and through his crucifixion upon the cross and his being raised to new life again! -- JOHN IS TOO CAREFUL OF A WRITER NOT TO HAVE INTENDED FOR US TO SEE A DEEPER SIGNIFICANCE IN THIS MIRACLE THAN JUST THE MERE TRANSFORMATION OF ONE TYPE OF LIQUID INTO ANOTHER TYPE OF LIQUID. And we can easily see this type of dual meaning given to the event we see not only here, but also in the **3rd and 4th chapters of John's Gospel account**.

In **CHAPTER THREE**, Jesus is teaching Nicodemus that even though he would never be able to find the fullest expression of God's love for him in any type of religious efforts being expended by himself on his own part, JESUS PROMISES NICODEMUS A LIVING RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS HEAVENLY FATHER—BY HIS BECOMING BORN AGAIN INTO GOD'S KINGDOM THROUGH THE WATER AND THE WORD. “*TRULY, TRULY, I SAY TO YOU UNLESS A MAN IS BORN AGAIN OF WATER AND THE SPIRIT HE CAN IN NO WAY ENTER THE KINGDOM OF GOD; FOR THAT WHICH IS BORN OF THE FLESH IS FLESH, BUT THAT WHICH IS BORN OF THE SPIRIT IS SPIRIT*” (JOHN 3:5-6)

IN **JOHN 4**, WE ARE REMINDED HOW THE WATER IN JACOB'S WELL COULD NEVER HAVE FULLY SATISFIED THAT SAMARITAN WOMAN, WHO IN ADDITION TO BE BORN INTO THIS WORLD WITH THE WRONG RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION, IT SEEMS, HAD ALSO BEEN MARRIED AND DIVORCED **it five different times to five different men, but who was not living with another man, to whom she was not married!**

Jesus knew all about these SAD REALITIES ASSOCIATED WITH THIS WOMAN'S LIFE TO BE TRUE, **and yet** ALSO OFFERED TO HER THE LIVING WATER OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S PRESENCE TO COME AND DWELL WITHIN HER—TO BRING TO HER PERSONALLY NOT ONLY THE FORGIVENESS OF HER SINS—BUT ALSO RECONCILIATION WITH THE HEAVENLY FATHER! **Jesus told her:** *"Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again, but whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give them shall never thirst again; the water that I shall give them shall be in them a well of water spring up into everlasting life!"*

Following this there is this marvelous TRANSFORMATION THAT TAKES PLACE WITHIN THIS WOMAN, evidenced in her marvelous testimony to the other people in her village, whom she formerly had AVOIDED LIKE THE PLAGUE, SUDDENLY BECOMES: "COME AND SEE A MAN WHO HAS TOLD ME ABOUT ALL THE THINGS THAT I EVER DID: IS THIS NOT THE CHRIST?" (JOHN 4:29)

And then we are told: *"Many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him because of the testimony of this woman, and many more believed because of Christ's own Word that he spoke to them personally when he came among them" (John 4:39, 41)!*

SHE NOT ONLY TESTIFIED THAT JESUS WAS THE MESSIAH, BUT SHE INVITED OTHER TO COME AND LISTEN TO JESUS WORDS ALSO BEING SPOKEN TO THEM THROUGH HIS OWN LIPS, EVEN AS HE HAD FIRST SPOKEN TO HER. AND ONCE AGAIN JOHN CONCLUDES THIS WHOLE EPISODE BY SAYING, "MANY BELIEVED..."

Phillip Yancey has this to say in his book THE JESUS I NEVER KNEW: "The wine came from huge thirty-gallon jugs that stood full of water at the front of the house, vessels that were used by observant Jews to fulfill the rules on ceremonial washing. EVEN A WEDDING FEAST HAD TO HONOR THE BURDENSOME RITUALS OF CLEANSING. JESUS, PERHAPS WITH A TWINKLE IN HIS EYE, TRANSFORMED THOSE JUGS, PONDEROUS SYMBOLS OF THE OLD WAY OF LIFE UNDER GOD'S LAW INTO THE NEW WINESKINS OF GOD'S GRACE AND MERCY SHOWN TO US IN THE GOSPEL!" (Phillip Yancey, THE JESUS I NEVER KNEW, Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1995, p. 168.)!

3. FINALLY, JESUS'S GLORY IS REVEALED IN HIS TRANSFERENCE TO US, SO MANY TIMES IN THIS LIFE, THE CREDIT FOR ACCOMPLISHMENTS IN OUR LIVES, IN THE EYES OF OTHER PEOPLE THAT WE NEVER COULD HAVE EVER ACHIEVED APART FROM HIS GRACE.

AT THE END OF THIS ACCOUNT IS A LOVELY LITTLE GOSPEL PICTURE THAT, UNFORTUNATELY, WOULD BE VERY EASY FOR US TO MISS, AND TO UNFORTUNATELY MISS COMPLETELY! In verse 9 we read: ***"When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the maser of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "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" (Vv. 9-10)!***

BUT HE HADN'T, HAD HE? HE'D BEEN HOPELESS. LEFT TO HIMSELF, THE BRIDEGROOM WOULD HAVE FAILED AND FAILED MISERABLY! HE HADN'T DONE HIS JOB; HE'D LET THE WINE RUN OUT. **When he gets summoned before this man called the "MASTER OF THE FEAST" or the chief steward, imagine how he may have been feeling, especially if he himself was not aware of this great miracle that Jesus had just performed! For years to come he'll face ridicule and shame from his wife's family. The whole community will know about it; he'll never be taken seriously again. And now he's been summoned to his first telling off. -- SO, ISN'T IT POSSIBLE THAT THE ANXIOUS AND NERVOUS GROOM IS NOW BRACING HIMSELF, PREPARING HIS EXCUSES. BUT, UNBELIEVABLY, WHEN THE BRIDEGROOM FACES**

JUDGEMENT AT THE HANDS OF THIS CHARACTER, HE DOESN'T GET A STRIP TORN OFF HIM. HE GETS PRAISED, AND LAVISH PRAISE AT THAT! PRAISE, FUNDAMENTALLY, THAT HE DIDN'T DESERVE.

Only the servants and the disciples know the truth. As far as the steward and the guests are concerned the bridegroom has done a good job. Not just a good job: a fantastic job! He's apparently provided really choice wine, not any old plonk fit for the end of a wedding, and plenty of it.

There's no sign, is there, of Jesus popping up and saying, actually, I did all this, I saved the day: just give this idiot what he deserves. No, Jesus is content to let this groom take the glory. Jesus is happy to *transfer* the praise and glory that should be his and make it the groom's.

And that's what he does for us, isn't it? It's a super little gospel picture. Every one of us is like this bridegroom. In religious terms our lives are failures: we've failed to do what we ought to do. Our spiritual resources have run dry. We've got nothing to offer anyone, least of all God. Like this hapless groom, when we get summoned, we deservedly face condemnation.

SO WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN WHEN YOU AND I FACE THE JUDGE OF ALL THINGS TO GIVE AN ACCOUNT OF OUR LIVES? I'M NOT LOOKING FORWARD TO HIM JUDGING ME ON MY RECORD. I'M WELL AWARE OF MY FAILURES.

BUT IT CERTAINLY WOULD BE A NICE SURPRISE, WOULDN'T IT, FOR ANY OF US WHEN WE FACE UP TO GOD, AND HE LOOKS US OVER, AND CHECKS HIS RECORDS — **it would be a shock if what we heard were: that was a life well-lived; that was a glorious life; well done, good and faithful servant!**

THAT'S CERTAINLY NOT WHAT WE DESERVE. BUT, LIKE THE BRIDEGROOM, THAT'S WHAT WE RECEIVE WHENEVER JESUS ENTERS INTO OUR LIVES. JESUS REVEALS HIS GLORY BY *TRANSFERRING* HIS GLORY INTO OUR LIVES. **When we stand before the Father, he sees his Son. What Jesus did for this bridegroom is a lovely Gospel illustration.**

BROTHERS AND SISTERS, I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT WITHOUT JESUS I WOULD BE UTTERLY TERRIFIED TO BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE BY GOD. **But if we make Jesus our Lord he clothes us in his glory. He both transfers his glory to us and wipes out our failure. That's why he lived to die: in his death he bears our sins, but he does more than that, he transfers his righteousness to us.**

SO HERE IS JESUS REVEALING HIS GLORY IN THE FIRST OF HIS SIGNS. THE GLORY OF HIS TIMING: HE CAME TO DIE AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME FOR SINNERS LIKE YOU AND ME. THE GLORY OF HIS TRANSFORMING: HE TRANSFORMS EMPTY, DRIED UP RELIGION INTO JOY-GIVING ABUNDANCE. THE GLORY OF HIS TRANSFERRING: LIKE THIS HAPLESS BRIDE GROOM, HE TRANSFERS HIS GLORY TO US; HE CLOTHES US IN HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS. **These disciples can only have glimpsed a little of this at the time, but nonetheless we are told that, verse 11, they put their faith in him. This sign achieved its goal. In the words of chapter 20, they had come to believe that Jesus was the Christ the Son of God, and by believing they were receiving new life from God through him! Amen**