

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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

This is what God says about Jesus changing water into wine at the wedding at Cana, Jesus manifested his glory. But what does this mean? While it’s true that in this event we see Jesus as all powerful and able to change one thing into another because he is God in the flesh, we see his glory made known in that he shows mercy to his people. This is what Jesus does and who he is, he is the God of mercy even as he himself is our mercy seat with the Father.

Perhaps this is why this reading gets people uncomfortable. We have a hard time with seeing God in this way because our lives as sinners take one of two paths when confronted with God’s mercy and we can be scandalized by it. In our sin, we either turn into Pharisees or we abuse his mercy. It’s only in repentance and faith do we rightly know and cling to Christ and rejoice when he shows us mercy and he shows mercy to others.

God inspired St. John to write, “On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’” Here this account is before you and it’s only found in John’s Gospel. Jesus is here at Cana, a place where to this day scholars are not entirely sure where this was. Needless to say, it was a small place, and this wedding is going on.

When the wine runs out there’s a problem. There’s really nothing the bridegroom or the master of the feast can do about this other than just report what’s happened. Mary, the mother of Jesus, though goes to her Son. She knows he can do something about this situation. What she expects him to do we aren’t told but she knows that it will be good whatever he says. She’s a model of faith for us here that we go to God and make our requests known to the Lord knowing all the while, whatever answer comes from him may be, it is good because he himself is good. Even if the answer is not what we may think we need or want God is good and acts out of this goodness. The answer of Jesus to her, then, is a bit distant. “And Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’” Jesus speaks this way as if to say, “Mary, even though you are my mother my purpose and time to reveal all things has not yet come. Have patience. Listen to my words and see my works for they make known what I have come to do.”

Mary’s response, then, is still in faith that the servants do whatever the Lord says. It’s at this point Jesus does do something miraculous even though when compared to his later miracles it doesn’t seem like much. “Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, ‘Fill the jars with water.’ And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, ‘Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.’ So they took it.”

These jars were used for washing hands and the like according to the laws of the rabbis. These weren’t necessarily commanded by God to be done and really, they were manmade laws. There were some who joked at the time of Jesus that these manmade washings could make an unclean animal clean. That is, the laws and ceremonies could overtake and trump God’s laws. It’s no coincidence then that Jesus uses these same jars and puts them to use as something pointing to the one who fulfills God’s law and makes all things clean not by manmade inventions but by his life and death. Jesus takes this water and changes it into wine.

Wine in the Bible is spoken of often. It’s spoken of in negative ways and positive ways. Negatively it’s used in conjunction with drunkenness and all sorts of things that stem from how man has abused a good gift that God has given to his people. We get a glimpse of that in the response of the master of the feast. “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 isn’t the best

translation here in the ESV. A better way of way of rendering this could be “Each man gives the good wine first and then when they are drunk the poor wine.” This word for “drink freely” clearly means “drunk” or “intoxicated” and has a special connection with wine. Now it doesn’t state that Jesus is giving wine to drunks in order to get drunk, he is not the author of sin, but what is implied by the master of the feast is he thinks that Jesus is wasting this wine on people. He thinks there’s no reason why this good wine should be given to people at this stage in the feast because they have already been drinking and feasting.

This is where our inner Pharisee makes and appearance. He’s someone that likes to rear his ugly head when an opening arises that we can think we hold the higher moral ground over another. In this case, in regards to this text, we think we can be more moral than Jesus. We think we know better than God. This plays out in our minds when we hear this reading and we think, “Well Jesus shouldn’t give something out and let people abuse it. He would know better than to do that.” We then rationalize God’s law and think that somehow there are ways in which we can deny God’s good gifts or redefine them so that we think we can protect them better than God does with his commandments. What’s the Pharisaic response to this situation then? The master of the feast gives it for us, “Why do you give the good wine to them, couldn’t some people get drunk or be drunk already?” But really the real issue could be stated in this way, “Why do you give what is good to sinners, they’ll just waste it, abuse it, and sin? It’s better to just reject it.”

So, thinking about this, then, we know that God doesn’t contradict himself and he doesn’t tempt people or lead people into sin. Drunkenness is sinful, there’s no denying that, but on the flip side of the coin wine has positive associations in the Bible. Adding wine to a meal changes it from being a simple meal to a feast. Wine is also associated with joy, peace, restoration, the Messiah and his kingdom, eternal life, and the Holy Spirit. To deny or forbid drinking wine and alcohol would be to call God a liar. In Psalm 104, for just one example of many, we hear, “You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man’s heart.” Just as God causes the grass to grow so he uses wine to gladden the heart of man. God gives what is good to his people because he is good.

And that’s where the other issue comes into play and that is we abuse God’s gifts. We abuse his grace and mercy. Is that because God should know better than to give us these things, no, it’s because we take what is good and turn it into something used for evil. In that Epistle reading we see a similar thing with marriage, which is connected in many ways to this Gospel reading today. When you see marriage for the great gift that it is why is that people abuse it in so many sick and twisted ways? It’s seeming like each year it gets worse with couples living together before marriage, people trying to redefine it against God’s command and institution, and the divorce rate is high. Should God throw up his hands and simply say, “well I guess the world can’t handle this institution I gave them so I should just do away with it, it was a good try at least. My bad, guys.” Or as Christians should our attitude be to insult and mock marriage or downplay it simply because people abuse it and just say, “well marriage is not that important”?

When God gives something and attaches his blessing to it, we are called to not only honor it with our words and lives, but we are to uphold it, defend it, and fight for its right understanding and use. We have to see who we are in this and who God is. God is good and we are not, in our sin. The problem in all these things be it with wine, marriage, or pick any number of things is not God and what he establishes and gives, it’s us. Woe to those who refuse to show mercy and try to curse God by rejecting him and his gifts and insulting them. Woe too upon those who see God’s grace and mercy to them and mock him by thinking this frees them to indulge the flesh and use this as a license to sin and reject the guiding of God’s law in their lives. Those who refuse to show mercy to others refusing to forgive and holding their sin against them shouldn’t expect God to them show them mercy on the last day because they have rejected who Christ is and what he has done. Those who continue in their sin so that grace may abound likewise should open their eyes and turn from their sin for they have rejected the faith and work of Christ and stand under God’s wrath and judgment. God calls all of us, he calls you to repent.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ hear again these words. “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.” Behold Jesus today as he has made himself known. You have

an Epiphany today when you see this first miracle of Jesus recorded for you. Here is the Lord who has shown you mercy. He is the one who has come into the world as the one who brings together you and the Father. The great divorce between you and God because of your sin, because of you, is reconciled in Jesus who is your bridegroom. These wonderful words today ring so sweetly, “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.”

For you who stand outside of God in your sin, the Lord has brought you near to him. Jesus presents you before the throne of the Father as his spotless bride. Washed clean in baptism and clothed with Christ you stand as one who no longer is condemned in your sin. You are forgiven on account of Christ, you have been shown mercy. Going through this life you are the church and you see who you are in him who is your head. This forms your life. You repent of your sin and cling to Jesus as he is your only righteousness before God. As a baptized child of God, you go to God in prayer and pray, “thy will be done” because you know that whatever the Lord will answer it is good and for you. You walk through this life now in Christ as one who has been given the Holy Spirit. You exercise self-control, which is a fruit of the Spirit, when it comes to enjoying the good gifts of God and you abhor what God calls evil. You delight in his law and walk in his commandments. You see those who have sinned against you and you show them the same mercy that God has shown you in Christ for this is who you are a Christian. Your view in this life is the mind of Christ and you trust God’s word and cast your burdens on him.

God’s glory is seen at the wedding of Cana. His glory is seen in all of this and especially when his time did come for him to be raised up upon the cross and draw you to himself. In suffering the death you deserve, you know God’s glory as he has ransomed you. Find joy and refreshment in this and know that this is who your God is. As you suffer and are left wondering, searching, and crying out you have the God who changed water into wine and he is the same God who raised the dead even as himself is crucified and risen. Fix your eyes on him and his promise that he is for you. He gives you strength to endure and joy even in sadness. He gives you a new heart and right spirit that shows mercy even to those who have sinned greatly against you. The one who is the rock of offense, a stumbling block, is your cornerstone.

Thanks be to God for manifesting your Lord. See him and believe like the disciples who witnessed this sign worked that day in this small obscure town but was visited by the Light of world who has created all things. Feast where he is present and join in the unending hymn of praise with all of the saints. Rejoice, your heart, be glad and sing of the one who drank the cup of wrath and fills up your cup to the brim and then makes it overflow with the wine of his mercy. Take, eat, take, and drink at this feast of his very body and blood and look forward to that day when you sit at the eternal wedding feast where the choice wine flows freely and abundantly forever.

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