

John 2:1–11
2nd Sun. after Epiphany
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
January 15, 2023

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Our Lord's first miracle at the wedding in Cana, where He turned water into wine, can seem like such an insignificant miracle compared to His other miracles. As the Lord of creation Jesus was of course able to re-create water into wine. "All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made," and so Jesus always has the power to re-create what He already created. In fact, God makes water into wine all the time. He waters the earth, allows grapes to grow, and He even built the process of fermentation into the fabric of nature. Here, Jesus miraculously speeds up the process that He Himself oversees all the time.

It's not the power behind this miracle that seems insignificant, though, but the purpose. We understand when Jesus heals the blind, the deaf, and the lame, or when Jesus casts out demons or raises the dead. Those miracles actually help people in really big ways. So why is this seemingly mundane, insignificant miracle presented to us as our Lord's first, or chief, miracle? How does changing water into wine at a wedding celebration manifest God's glory? It almost seems irresponsible! The wedding guests had been drinking freely, and now our Lord gives them the best wine! But we'll see this morning that this first miracle of Jesus is far from insignificant. At Cana, Jesus not only miraculously turns water into wine. He also does two other things, which we'll discuss this morning. First, Jesus blesses and redeems earthly marriage, and the entire order of creation, with His presence. Second, Jesus shows us that He is Himself the true Bridegroom, who is preparing us, His bride, for an eternal Feast yet to come.

It comes as little surprise that the wedding at Cana is frequently a subject at Christian weddings. In the English-speaking world, the rite most often used for holy matrimony comes from the Book of Common Prayer. The pastor's introduction to this marriage rite is one of the most iconic speeches in the English language. You hear it in movies, at least part of it, and you've hopefully heard it in person any number of times: "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God and before His Church to witness the union of this man and this woman in holy matrimony. This is an honorable estate and blessed by God in Paradise, before humanity's fall into sin. In marriage we see a picture of the communion between Christ and His bride, the Church. Our Lord blessed and honored marriage with His presence and first miracle at Cana in Galilee," and so on. After highlighting the divine origins and blessings of marriage, the pastor then outlines the divine purposes for marriage: the procreation of children, mutual companionship, and delight in one another.

Marriage is an honorable estate and blessed by God in Paradise, before humanity's fall into sin. So often it is forgotten that marriage is part of God's perfect order of creation. The Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man He made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then Adam said: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh (Gen 2:22–24). That's how God established human existence from the beginning, before the fall into sin. Woman was taken out of man. Man and woman then reunite so that man can be born of woman. So marriage is not simply a curb against sexual immorality (1 Cor 11:12), although after the Fall into sin it is that, too. Marriage is not a man-made institution we are free to tamper with.

It's not simply a cultural institution we are able to change on a whim, no matter how our current age tries to redefine marriage. No, marriage was instituted by God even before man's fall into sin. Marriage between one man and one woman for life is integral to the very fabric of creation. It is part of God's order of creation.

Of course, after the Fall into sin things changed. Strife entered marriage just as it did every other relationship. Pain would now accompany the bearing of children. Yet God does not destroy His creation and start all over. No, God redeems His creation and continues to bless it. God redeems the bond of marriage and continues to bless it. In Jesus, God entered into His creation to win it back from the powers of sin, death, and the devil. And so "Our Lord blessed and honored marriage with His presence and first miracle at Cana in Galilee." Jesus loves marriage, family, and children along with the simple pleasures of life and human existence, because that's how He created life to be! Jesus rejoices with those who rejoice by attending this wedding and reception with his mother and disciples.

Not much can be more joyful than a wedding and a wedding reception, the celebration of God's bringing together a husband and wife to begin a new family. That's why a Jewish wedding and reception in the first century would go on more than just half the night, like we are used to. The people in Jesus's day would party for a week or even longer. That's why so much wine would be necessary. They really knew how to celebrate a man leaving his father and mother and holding fast to his wife! And why shouldn't such a beautiful, godly thing like marriage be celebrated so much? Our Lord delights when His children enter into the estate of marriage and we ought to delight as well.

But then the wine ran out. If you've been to a wedding reception where there's not enough food and drink, you can begin to understand the embarrassment of running out of wine.

At a first century Jewish wedding, the groom was responsible for the reception. That's why after Jesus turned the water into wine, the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said what any good host knows: "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." If it's the bridegroom who provides the wine, then we catch a glimpse here of who the Bridegroom really is. Who provided the wine? Jesus did! Jesus is the Bridegroom. Elsewhere Jesus is explicitly called the Bridegroom (John 3:29), or refers to Himself as the Bridegroom (Mark 2:19).

Jesus is the Bridegroom, who left His Father's home in Heaven to be united to His Bride, the Church. At His incarnation, God became one flesh with us. He united Himself to our flesh and blood more intimately than when a husband and wife come together. Our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, as a good husband, as the perfect husband, loved His Bride, the Church, and gave Himself up for us by dying for our sins on the cross. The Bridegroom died for us that He might sanctify us in Holy Baptism and so present the Church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that we might be holy and without blemish in the sight of God. Our Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, also loves us as His own Body. He nourishes us and cherishes us in His Word and Sacraments as a husband nourishes and cherishes His wife. This relationship between Christ and the Church is the ultimate reality our earthly marriages point to. In our marriages, we have a picture of the communion between Christ and His bride, the Church.

If marriage is a picture of Christ the Bridegroom and His bride the church, then the feasting at a wedding reception is in some sense a picture of the resurrection of the dead and the joys of living in the new heavens and the new earth when our Bridegroom returns. The prophet Amos describes the restoration of Israel at the Last Day, saying: "the mountains shall drip sweet

wine, and all the hills shall flow with it . . . they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine . . . they shall never again be uprooted out of the land that I have given them,” says the Lord.

In Isaiah 25, we also hear a connection between food and drink and the Lord swallowing up death forever: “On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined. And He will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever.” On the mountain of Calvary our Lord Jesus Christ took our sins upon Himself. Our Bridegroom died for His Bride, the Church, but in His death He also swallowed up death forever and rose to life again.

On that same mountain our LORD Jesus Christ also made for you a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine. His body given for you and His blood shed for you still feeds you and strengthens your faith until that day when we will feast with Him anew at the eternal Marriage Feast of the Lamb in our Father’s Kingdom. In this meal our Lord provides you with everything you need to strengthen and keep you firm in His Word and faith unto life everlasting. As He miraculously comes to you with His body and blood in the bread and wine, He thereby unites Himself to you as a Bridegroom to His Bride. And where Christ is, there are all the good things He brings with Him, including forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

At Cana, our Lord Jesus Christ blessed earthly marriage with His presence, confirming to us the divine origins and the goodness of married life. In turning water into wine, our Lord confirmed not only His power as the creator of all things. Even more so, Jesus shows us that He is the true Bridegroom and we, the Church, are His Bride. He united Himself to our flesh and blood and He continues coming to us in His flesh and blood in the Lord’s Supper for the

forgiveness of our sins until the resurrection of the dead and the eternal Marriage Supper of the Lamb. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.