

The Wine

John 2:1-11

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany, January 17, 2016

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

In the movie *Percy Jackson and the Sea of Monsters* there is a character who stands under the curse of Zeus. I don't remember what he did to make Zeus mad but Zeus bears this man a grudge. Since the man is a wine lover Zeus curses the man by changing wine into water every time the man tries to drink wine. The instant the wine is on his lips Zeus changes it into water. He never gets to enjoy the wine. Early in the movie he is complaining, "How long can Zeus hold a grudge." Someone tells him, "Well since Zeus is a god, a pretty long time." The man replies, "The Christians have a god who can do this trick in reverse. Now that's a god!"

It is a humorous moment in the story. I know that I laughed out loud the first time I saw the scene. Our laughter indicates our misunderstanding of wine and weddings in the United States. Because of Protestantism in the United States we have a history of tee totaling. There are still blue laws on the books in some counties forbidding the sale of alcohol on Sunday or at other specified times. There was a time when prohibition was written into the American Constitution.

As a result of this American attitude toward alcohol, we think of wine in either one of two extremes. It is either a fun drink necessary at a party in order to lower people's inhibitions so they can have a good time or it is a drink which invites licentiousness and moral laxity, a drug which enslaves those who drink it with inebriation. We Americans tend toward one extreme or the other. Either wine is a great evil and should be avoided at all costs or wine is a drink like other drinks and should be enjoyed at appropriate social occasions.

With this kind of an attitude toward alcohol it is impossible to understand why our Lord does and says what He does and says at the wedding at Cana in Galilee. It is also impossible to understand why His mother does what she does at the wedding in Cana of Galilee. The reason that it is impossible for us to understand what is going on is because when we read this we think that the lack of wine is a social faux pas. The chief steward of the feast forgot to order enough wine. For us there is nothing going on here other than a big embarrassment for the couple because they hired the wrong wedding planner. It is something that the couple could laugh about in later years.

But if this is nothing more than an inventory mistake why does Mary bring the problem to the attention of Jesus? Why should she care whether or not the wine was gone? Why does Jesus respond by telling her that it is none of their business, but when He explains why it is none of their business, He does not tell her that the chief steward needs to get a new wine catalog, He rather says that His hour had not yet come? In John's Gospel, Jesus talks about His hour coming. The hour that He is talking about is the hour of His crucifixion. Why would Jesus bring up His crucifixion at a wedding reception? What does His crucifixion have to do with a lack of wine? How does it solve the problem of a lack of wine? And why on earth does Jesus go through the trouble of changing water in to wine? Why not simply order more from the store? I supposed you will tell me that they did not have wine stores in those days the way that we do nowadays. If that is the case I would point out to you that simply confirms that the attitudes of these people toward wine and how they understood wine was far different from the way that we understand it. Jesus performs a miracle, the first of His signs and by doing so reveals His glory to the extent that the disciples put their faith in Him. This has to be more than simply Jesus is a better wedding planner than the one you had and if you want a perfect wedding talk to Jesus.

Wine is God's blessing.

Now I understand that the Scriptures say that wine is a mocker and beer is a brawler. I understand that the Scriptures warn us against the color of wine and how it sparkles in the cup. But I also know that the Scriptures talk about wine at the harvest time and how people rejoice at the harvest with all of the grain and wine that they have. They rejoice because God blessed them with grain and with wine. The only way things grow is with God's blessings. They grow and produce grain and wine. It makes people rejoice because God has blessed them. In Psalm 104:14-15 God is praised because He makes 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. God bestows the blessings of His creation. When people are blessed they have plenty of wine in order to be glad, oil in order to be healthy and bread in order to be strong. Without these blessings gladness, health, and strength flee away. The wine at this wedding feast is to be a source of gladness for this couple. And now the wine is gone because the chief steward that they hired does not know where the blessings of God come from.

A friend of mine was doing research on this passage and he wound up calling a Rabbinic hotline that Jews could use in order to ask questions about their own faith. Even though my friend is a Lutheran pastor and a Gentile the Rabbi answered his question anyway. His question was what is the ancient Jewish understanding of wine at a wedding. The Rabbi answered that the ancient Jews understood that plenty of wine at a wedding meant that the blessings of God would be upon the couple for the rest of their lives because they had been blessed with wine at their wedding. A lack of wine meant that God was withholding His blessing from the couple and that His blessing would be withheld from their marriage. The reason the ancient Jews believed this is because of the psalms which make clear that wine is a blessing from God.

This lack of wine is not a social faux pas. The groom has hired a terrible chief steward who has not provided the blessings of God because he does not know where they come from.

Now, all of a sudden the conversation that John records in chapter two makes a whole lot more sense. The mother of our Lord is aware that this a terrible thing which has happened to this couple. The wine has run out. God's blessings have been cut off. She also realizes where the blessings of God come from. They come from her Son so she tells her Son, "They have no wine." She may as well have said, "They are under God's curse." She probably whispered it to her Son because of the shame that was coming upon the couple. But at the same time why should she tell Jesus this unless she believed that He could restore the blessing of God to this couple.

Our Lord's answer now also makes sense. He responds by asking, "What is that to you and to Me?" In other words it is none of our business. But when Jesus explains why it is none of His or His mother's business, He says that it is because the hour of His crucifixion had not yet come. He knew that He was the source of blessing for this couple, but He also knew that the blessing of God could not be bestowed upon this couple unless He was crucified. Only His crucifixion would obtain the blessings of God for anybody including this couple.

Mary understood that Jesus is currently deciding not to do anything. She could have assumed that the reason Jesus was not going to do anything was because He could not do anything. But Mary still knows that Jesus is the source of God's blessings. Instead of becoming angry with Him or pulling rank on Him (she is His mother after all), she simply tells the servants, "Do whatever He might tell you." Mary knows that He might say nothing at all and the couple would go without God's blessing. Mary also knows that if the couple is going to have God's blessing it will have to come from Him. He will either

give it or He won't, but either way the blessing of God will come from Him so do whatever He might tell you because if the blessing of God is to be found for this couple, it will be found in whatever He might tell them.

Now people, at this point Jesus might say nothing. He does not have to say anything. He is not the chief steward of this wedding. It is not His fault that they lack of the blessings of God. He is a guest and responsible for nothing. He should be the one who is eating and drinking the groom's bread and wine. He is not obligated to say anything to these servants.

And the Lord speaks! And the Lord speaks! He speaks and He tells the servants to fill the stone water jars with water.

Now that is a curious thing. Put yourself in the servant's position. How is filling stone water jars with water going to help? And why the stone water jars used for the purification rites of the Jews? Now a word of explanation here.

In the book of Leviticus God commands that certain impurities and uncleannesses be removed from people by washing with water. If a person had become unclean in the sight of God, God in many instances required them to take a bath in order to become clean again. The reason that this was important was because if a person was defiled God forbade them to stand in His presence at the tabernacle. If a person could not stand in the presence of God at the tabernacle, they did not have access to making a sacrifice to God. If they could not make a sacrifice to God, they were cut off from His forgiveness and if they were cut off from His forgiveness they were cut off from His blessing as well.

In the book of Leviticus it is defilement from sicknesses and death that make people unclean. The washing that God commanded in the book of Leviticus washed them clean from sickness and from death. It allowed them to reenter God's presence, make sacrifices, and obtain His blessing.

So if I am a servant at the wedding feast and Jesus tells me to fill six stone water jars which are used for purification and to fill them with water, I am going to immediately assume that Jesus is planning on purifying someone. Since these jars hold like sixty gallons of water, Jesus must intend on purifying a lot of people.

For now Jesus will simply mention that His hour had not yet come, but in reality by performing the miracle that Jesus performed and bringing the blessings of God to this couple by giving them wine, Jesus is by definition bringing purification to them. He is purifying them of their sins, their uncleanness and their death. Unbeknownst to them the presence of God was standing among them. He was there to bless them with more wine than they knew what to do with, but in order to stand in His presence they needed to be purified so when Jesus performs His miracle He uses the jars that were used for such purification and He mentions that His hour had not yet come, for unless His hour would come all the water in the world would not purify them or bring God's blessings. But you know that His hour did come. Purification was made. And the blessings of wine and every other blessing of God's creation was bestowed upon this couple and upon you.

By the time Jesus is done doing all of this He has become the chief steward. The chief steward that the groom hired is an idiot. He does not know from where the blessings of God come. He did not provide the blessings of God for this couple. He did not fulfill His vocation. But Jesus fulfilled His vocation and brought the blessings of God to this couple. This is what happens when you invited God to your wedding. He comes as a guest, but before the day is over He has taken over the whole feast and is providing everyone with what they need for glad hearts, health, and strength.

Now what is the application for you? What are we supposed to get out of this?

Well, you are supposed to understand where the blessings of God come from. That is the first thing. Obviously it is Jesus.

Mary knows that Jesus is the source of God's blessing, but none of us compare with Mary. We are not the mother of our Lord. We have not been visited by angels to our knowledge. But Mary is not the only person there who knows where the blessings of God come from. The chief steward does not know. The groom does not know. In this entire wedding feast the people who know where the blessings of God come from are those servants. John goes out of his way to tell you the obvious. The servants knew where the wine had come from. The servants knew what Jesus had done. And the servants were the ones who drew the water even though it was a crazy thing to do.

If I were there in all of my glorious faithlessness and Jesus told me to fill the jars with water up to the top, I would have asked Him, "How is that going to help?" and our Lord would have consigned me to hell on the spot. The servants do not ask that question. They do what the Lord tells them to do. After all when it comes to the Lord what else are you going to do except what He tells you to do? And when you do it you realize where the blessings of God come from and you enjoy the blessings of God. You enjoy His purification from uncleanness, sin, and death and you enjoy being in the presence of God with glad hearts. The servants did this because they did what Jesus asked them to do even though it was crazy.

So even though it is crazy when Jesus tells you to repent and be baptized in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, just do it. It sounds crazy. Even Luther sticks it in the catechism, "How can water do such great things." But just do it and you will find purification for your sins and all of the blessings of God.

And even when Jesus says, "Take this and eat it. It is My body," and "Take this and drink it. It is My blood," even though it sounds crazy and even Luther asks, "How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things," just do it. And you will find that the hour of Jesus did come and with it came your purification and all of the blessings of God, enough wine to make your heart glad forever.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.