

## "A WEDDING, SOME WINE, AND JESUS"

TEXT: "This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee,  
and manifested forth his glory" (John 2: 11)

### INTRODUCTION

It seems rather significant that when Jesus began his ministry and performed his first miracle, that he should choose to do it in a home, and that the home should be a home of common people. It provides an insight into the nature of the Christian faith which all too often has been obscured. When Jesus wanted to show men what God is like, he did not go off to some desert cave to be a holy man, nor shut himself up in a temple to live apart from life. He came walking into the midst of life, into its crowded streets, into its simple homes where people lived and loved and laughed and had their problems. Christianity is not the cloistered faith that medieval history has made it out to be, nor is Christ the white-robed figure in a cathedral window that its art has fashioned.

### A WEDDING

There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, some three miles from Nazareth.

A village boy met a village girl; they fell in love. "This is so sudden" she said. And there was a wedding. It happens all the time. Jesus was invited and he went. It was just like him to be there. There he was - in a little village - present, to see a peasant girl get married.

It offers us a hint of how God comes to us - so often it's not in the impressive, showy things, but in the humble, homespun, lowly things of life. Christ in the home of the common people - is there anything more important than that? Home is the heart of society, the little world where all the problems of the big world are first prepared for. And what happens in our homes has more to do with the Kingdom of God than what happens in temples or thrones or even the Halls of Congress. And we need to remember that a religion which does not tell on our home life and makes us thoughtful and unselfish there isn't really much of a religion. Christ began his ministry in a home. He performed his first miracle in a home. That's where he wants first and most of all to be. ~~The home of the people is the heart of the world. And we should add: the head of the home is the father. The heart of the home is the mother.~~

Another thing to think about is this. This was not a marriage only, but in the traditional custom of the East, a marriage supper - a feast of fun. ~~Here were~~ gaiety, laughter, music, young people gathered to make merry. And Christ was there - at the heart of it all. They wanted him to be there; had no fear that he would be out of his element, or fail to fit in, or make the others uncomfortable, as John the Baptist, with his asceticism, would have done. ~~And be sure there was no awkward silence at that part of the table where he sat. For this man from Nazareth was~~ never one to hold himself aloof from innocent human happiness - a fact which many of his followers have forgotten. This was a festive occasion and Jesus was there.

Yes, in the minds of some people there still lingers the idea that festivity and piety do not go together - that somehow you have to shift gears when you go from one to the other, from the spiritual to the cheerful, or from the cheerful to the spiritual. This was a wedding feast, a banquet of enjoyment, a party. Jesus shared ~~in~~ its gladness, by his presence suggesting that the laughter and the pleasures of life are as much a part of the Kingdom of God as its conflicts.

"There is something about your way of looking at things that I like" wrote Parson Brown. "Many of the religious people I know, when they talk of religion, they have a bedside manner with them and walk about in felt slippers. And if they speak of God, they always tidy themselves up a bit. But you seem to come in and out of all the

rooms of God's house as though you were quite at home. You open the doors without knocking, you hum on the stairs - it isn't always hymns, yet they seem religious. My aunt thinks you're not quite reverent, but then she has felt slippers on her mind and is dreadfully afraid of spilling the soup or choking over the porridge."

The religion of Christ is a joyous religion in spite of what we have done to it. The church of Christ should be the happiest place on earth. We want a church where families can worship together, learn of Christ and his way together. We want the children to think of the church as a place of happy experiences. We want the church to be in the homes and the families to be in the church. Remember: that the first miracle Jesus performed was to heighten the happiness of a home.

#### SOME WINE

Now suppose we look at another thing in this story. Something went wrong at the wedding. A very embarrassing thing happened. Right in the middle of the festivity there came a painful pause. A servant whispered in the ear of the bride's mother and her face flushed red. Something had apparently gone wrong in the kitchen. This does happen. We husbands know about it. We've felt that little kick on the shin under the table or that glance from the other end of the table when the company wondered why we suddenly stopped using another helping. It happens in the best of families, but never with quite so much humiliation as to a bride's mother, right at the proudest moment of all, to have to let it be known that the strain has been too much on the family pocketbook. Call it pride, if you will. They had run out of wine; there was no more wine to serve to the guests. What a dreadful moment for the hostess. (I suppose we would say that the wine makers must have been doing something right)

Now I'm not going to take time to answer the defense of convivial drinking that some people find in this beautiful story. "Jesus turned the water into wine, so...." And so they argue. What some people can wangle out of that. Water so scarce and uncertain, native wine is what the people drank in that little land - the fruit of the vineyard. No one got intoxicated on it; at least it would take a heap of it. And knowing Jesus as we do: his hatred of all that injures and harms life, it takes a rather great stretch of the mind to make this story into biblical sanction for what goes on in some places that we won't mention here this morning.

Nor am I going to trouble myself as to how the miracle was accomplished. Some there are who fasten all of their attention on the miraculous, try their best to explain it, and miss the point of the whole thing. Personally I vote with Walt Whitman in this who suggested "that to the reverent mind the whole world is full of miracle and mystery." I see nothing anywhere but miracle. Pity the person, who balking at one miracle, misses the wonder that is all around him. For every day, right before our very eyes, God is working miracles: a rose is opening its petals, a baby is being born, a seed is pushing up to the light of day to become a tree or a loaf of bread. God's world is full of the miraculous.

The impressive thing, the important thing for me in this story is not the miracle, but rather in the purpose. And it comes to me with deep assurance that there is a divine element in life, in all of the common events of it. An eternal goodness stands ready to take over right at the point where our human interests and resources fail. Our wine is always running out, you might say. We often come to the end of our human resources. Then it is that the miracle occurs, and we find new wine poured in to our lives - new energies just when we thought we couldn't go any further. This is the glory of it all, the glory of Christ's way - not the display of power, but the tenderness, the thoughtfulness, the touch of kindness on the common road of life. ~~He heightened the happiness of a home that day; he saved a mother from humiliation; a bride from being embarrassed before her friends.~~ How our Lord enters into people's

troubles. How he enriches things for us.

Where do you take your problems? When your wine runs out, when you come to the end of your powers, your resources - where do you turn? For that's bound to happen. Never a year goes by but that we face something too big to handle alone - an illness, a decision, a bereavement, a bitter disappointment, an unhappy experience - when it seems that you have come to the end of everything, where do you turn?

THE CLIMAX And now we come to the climax. When the ruler of the feast, or you might call him the MC - the master of ceremonies - tasted the wine, ~~he stood up to propose a toast. As he tasted it,~~ he paused, looked straight at the bewildered bridegroom. (All bridegrooms are bewildered, I suppose) "~~Strange~~" he mumbled. "What's strange?" "Why you have kept the good wine until the last". This wasn't the custom. The good wine, the best wine was always served first - then at the end, the poor wine. "You, sir, you have kept the best wine until the last".

I wonder why John makes a point of this. I wonder if there flashed in his mystic, oriental mind a larger truth than the words suggest? Was he having the toastmaster here give expression to a great truth: the eternal contrast between the way of Christ and the way of the world. For it's the custom of the world to serve its best wine first, to put down on the banquet board of life that which is pleasing, exciting, alluring, then afterwards that which is not so good. We do it all the time.

It's an old, old story, as old as the Garden of Eden - the betrayal of the senses, the deception of glamour, the disillusionment of violating some standards and old fashioned moral codes. When the Prodigal Son went off to the far country he didn't notice the afterwards. He had no idea that he would ever wind up in such a mess. All he saw was the gaiety, the music, the dancing, the glamour, the excitement, the allurements of the sensual. So many there are today, coming through the middle years, having tried to feed their hungry souls on just that - the thrills of life, the galmour, the excitement, not facing the afterwards - bored, cynical, fed-up, making the rounds from physician to lawyer to beauty parlor to psychiatrist to minister - wanting to know what's the matter with life, why romance plays out and why nothing seems to taste good any more. They're all around us. Old people, too, with life gone stale. They have never opened up their hearts to anything outside of themselves and now they find that they can't get away from their own petty selves. The best wine is used up, nothing left.

Here again is the glory of Christ. The wine of life he offers does not diminish. "I am come that they might have life" "I give unto them eternal life" - life that doesn't lose its flavor. Now this doesn't mean that the exuberance of youth can be continued, because it can't; the wine of energy does run out. The flame of youth does burn down. There's no use pretending that it doesn't. Anatole France said that the world was made all wrong, that he would have reversed the process. Instead of having people born babies and growing old, he would have them born old and gradually working back through the years of youth and childhood and thus preserve the charm and thrill of life.

But, he missed the secret of what Jesus was revealing. There is such a thing as eternal life, that is a life above the physical, a real kingdom of the mind and spirit. And it's in this realm where the real riches are - riches that can't diminish, riches of which the years cannot rob us, riches which ~~they can~~ only serve to ripen and enhance. The last of life, as Browning said, for which the first is made.

Lay hold then, for yourself, on this kingdom of the mind and spirit. Make the

years provide you with riches that can't play out or diminish. Lay hold on eternal life which is the gift of God - Christ's spirit in your home, in your heart, in the ways of the world. And when you come to the end of it, as come you must, be it this year, or ten years or fifty, you will think back to a little village in Galilee - Cana - and a wedding that Jesus attended - where a toastmaster stood with a shiny goblet in his hand and said, "You sir have kept the best to last".

LET US PRAY

On this day, Our Father, speak to our hearts and help us to remember the countless blessings given to us by loved ones in our homes.

Accept we pray the worship of our loving hearts and the devotion of daily lives in which we remember others and forget ourselves. In the spirit of Christ we pray. Amen