

"THE DAY JESUS WENT TO A WEDDING"

TEXT: "On the third day there was a marriage at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; Jesus also was invited to the marriage, with his disciples".

(John 2: 1, 2)

INTRODUCTION

It was at a wedding that Jesus performed the first of his many miracles. This seems to be an appropriate weekend to consider this miracle with the intent, of course, of letting some of the meaning of it spill over into our lives.

It was read to you earlier in the service. In some quarters it's often suggested that to enjoy one's self in our kind of world is to betray those causes that need our unbroken allegiance and support. And in the throes of this tension of wanting to enjoy, but perhaps feeling guilty, I turn to the account in John's Gospel that tells us about the day that Jesus went to a wedding.

And had Jesus done nothing more than simply grace that happy occasion with His presence we would still have cause for thanks. For the incident tells us a number of things about Him.

AT HOME WITH PEOPLE

To begin with, it's obvious from this story that Jesus was very much at home with people. He felt comfortable with them, and they with Him. We need to be careful not to idealize this wedding He attended. This was no society page affair. The list of guests did not read like an extract from "Who's Who in Jerusalem". This was a simple, country wedding. The nameless bride and groom were of the common people of the land.

We make a mistake to think of Him as the exclusive property of the theologians, or the "well-to-do", or the powerful. Perhaps no tribute paid Him meant more than that line from the Gospel, "The common people heard Him gladly". It may be that Jesus felt that the common people of the earth were the bearers of our world's hope and wisdom in a way that their more celebrated leaders were not.

William F. Buckley, Jr. made a point in his column some time ago to the effect that he would far rather trust his governance in which he would include the preservation of his civil rights and his intellectual freedom to the first 100 persons listed in the Cambridge, Massachusetts telephone directory than to the faculty of Harvard College. Something within me said "Amen" to his comment.

Anyway, those unpretentious citizens who gathered for the festivities at Cana that day long ago were the beneficiaries of His word and His presence.

ANOTHER THING

Another point suggested by this incident from John's Gospel is that Jesus apparently felt that weddings are important!

Most of the marriage ceremonies in the Christian world directly or indirectly make reference to the fact that Jesus attended the wedding at Cana. And it would be impossible to exaggerate the significance of His presence on that occasion for the young couple - wine crisis or no wine crisis.

Guests do help to make a wedding. A marriage is always enhanced by social reinforcement. To me it's sad to see a couple go down to City Hall by themselves

to be married there by a Judge or Justice of the Peace - not that I have anything against Judges and Justices. The sadness comes from the absence of social reinforcement of friends. Friends provide a context in which the sacral character of our life is expressed and strengthened.

Jesus went to a wedding. It was important, He felt, to be there!

I remember a custodian we had here at the Church some time ago who was grumbling because he had to work to get the Church ready for a wedding. Pews needed to be polished. Floors had to be mopped and waxed. Everything had to be "spiffed up". He remarked, "So much fuss for a 20 minute service". To which I replied, "Yes, but hopefully...it's for a lifetime" and with that word he cheered up enough to complete the cleaning chores.

I should like to think that our association with other people in the "milestone" occasions of life is a ministry in itself. It's a pity that we so often take what one might call the "hallmark way out" - that is, sending a card or a note instead of being present. But that's better than not responding at all. Our presence means much. By being with our friends and loved ones on their wedding day enriches their life in warm and wonderful ways. Remember that.

Jesus went to a wedding. Let us never forget that, and if we read carefully between the lines, He had Himself a good time.

ANOTHER THOUGHT

Now here's another thought to turn over in your mind. Jesus went to Cana even though He was committed to a mighty cause. He wasn't there as the officiating Rabbi. He was there as a friend of the family. He may have been there through the intercession of Nathaniel who came from Cana. I'm sure He considered His time spent there as time well spent!

It's always a joy to meet people who have a cause without being boring about it - people who have a burning vision in their hearts - who do not set out to dominate the life of every soul around them. Mark you, Jesus was just back from the struggle in the wilderness. Mark you, He was at a very important point in His life - choosing His team, mapping out His plays. Mark you, He probably had the feeling that His time was tight, limited, His days numbered. Yet, there He was at the wedding - relaxing and enjoying Himself.

As one reads the Gospels, he is impressed by the fact that Jesus' life was laced with intervals of pleasant social intercourse. This may not say anything to you, but it speaks to me because I find myself occasionally confronted with "one-cause zealots" who insist on administering their loyalty tests. All of the causes are good, needful of our support, and certainly one would like to be counted in the proper columns and be supportive of all gatherings conducted by the causes - but sometimes this is difficult and sometimes it can conflict with an evening spent with family or friends, relaxing in pleasant fellowship.

It was Mozart who said of himself, "My rests are more important than my notes". I remember something a colleague said, a friend who like so many clergy keeps a fairly tightly scheduled week. He observed,

"You know it's so important that we have a sense of leisure.
A sense of leisure can be even more important than leisure
itself".

Jesus began His public ministry by going to a wedding feast. He ended it by sitting down to supper with friends in an Upper Room. And in between, He found time to eat with Zacchaeus and others, time for visits to the home of Mary and Martha, time also for a big picnic with a lot of friends on a hillside. Had He done nothing more than grace this wedding in Cana with His presence, we would have had cause for much rejoicing. But He did more!

HE RESCUED IT He not only graced that occasion. He rescued it. A crisis developed when the wine ran out. It's entirely possible that Jesus and His disciples were partly to blame for the crisis that developed. The supply was depleted when the disciples and Jesus arrived. I don't want to make too much of this. However, He was alerted to the need by His mother. You know the story. He commanded that six stone jars be filled to the top. He asked the servants to draw, and when they did, it was wine and not water that they drew out. And the wine was of such quality that a veteran steward was heard to remark, "Why, you have kept the good wine until now!"

I haveno trouble believing in the miraculous here. In fact, I find it quite like Jesus. He wouldn't turn the stones into bread for Himself, but He did turn water into wine for other people. My faith does not rest on this miracle, but it extends to this miracle. Why should one doubt it? Each Spring in the vineyards of this world, God draws up water from the ground and transforms it into pungent juices of the grape. Maybe we should leave it to the poet who offered this line, "The modest water saw its God and blushed."

The Disciples were not inclined to exploit the wonders of Christ's deeds. In fact, the whole account suggests an intention to play down the spectacular.

AS A SIGN As a sign, it pointed beyond itself to something else. Symbolically, it was suggesting that Jesus' ministry was to be a ministry of replacement.

Those six jars represented the Old Testament ceremonial religion. Pans and utensils were washed by religious prescription with water from those jars. Henceforth, those jars are to be filled no longer with water, but with the new wine of the Gospel. "He came not to destroy, but to fulfill". "You have heard it said, but I say unto you". "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness and are dead, but the bread that I shall give you." "Everyone who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him...."

The sogn was not only pointing to this ministry of replacement, but also to the truth that Jesus had come into the world to restore the quality of our life, to change the water into the wine of life. We need to remember that before original sin, there was original goodness. Men and women are not essentially bad. Something good in us all has been spoiled. The ministry of Jesus is to restore the luster of that which has lost a bit of its shine.

He did not come to stop the music. He did not come to silence the poetry. He did not come to dam up the juices of life. He came that we might have life, and that we might have it abundantly.

OUR TASK Our task then, if He has turned our water into wine, is to raise the quality of life around us - not only in the physical environment, but also in the more important spheres of relationships and inner dispositions.

To keep alive before the world the option of a better way. This, I feel, is our task as Christians.

There are people in our world who spoil, who lower, who degrade, who pull down. Every home they visit, every shop they enter, every office in which they work, every profession in which they serve - tends to be poorer for their presence. There are forces at work all around us that would turn the wine of life into water - that would reduce a home to a house, a vocation to a job, an education to job-training, knowledge to information, souls to enumber, sexuality to lust, poetry to prose, faith to church membership.

But our mission as those who have felt the life-giving touch and power of the Christ is to raise the quality of life that people might discover again what they once had and lost. I like what one of the biographers said of the last Justice Felix Frankfurter:

"What he gave his time was an enlargement of its human life. As long as he was there in his office in this building or his house on Dumbarton Avenue, or off at Heath in the Massachusetts hills in the Summer, the world had an extra dimension for us all."

CLOSING There is a story about a priest in a small European town who was about to leave for another assignment. The people of the parish decided that as a farewell gift they would present him with a cask of wine. Each family in the parish was to bring some wine from its own vineyard. When all was ready the priest was taken to the cask and told to draw himself a glass. As he did so nothing came out but water. Each person had said to himself,

"What difference will it make? My contribution is of no great importance. The quality of my wine is so weak that it would spoil the quality of the rest. If I just put in some water, what I do will not be noticed."

The day Jesus went to a wedding in Cana of Galilee. It helps us to remember that life is not an ordeal to be endured, but rather like a wedding feast - to be enjoyed and celebrated. He changed water into wine. He always does for His mission was a mission of replacement and restoration. And once He has touched our lives, He then calls on us to raise the quality of life around us.

It can happen now - here, today - in us and through us - and you and I are called by Jesus to change the water of life into wine.

PRAYER Make us sensitive to Your nearness and presence, O God. Help us to catch the real joy of life. Let the symbolic meaning of this miracle of our Lord spill over into our lives and into the lives of others. In His name we pray. Amen

"THE DAY JESUS WENT TO A WEDDING"

TEXT: "On the third day there was a marriage at Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus was also invited to the marriage, with His disciples".

(John 2: 1 and 2)

INTRODUCTION One day long ago, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, some three miles from the town of Nazareth. A village boy met a village girl; they fell in love. "This is so sudden" she said. And plans were made for a wedding. It happened then; it happens now.

Jesus received an invitation to the wedding, and He went - as did His mother and His disciples. I believe it was just like Him to be there. And there He was - in this remote town of Galilee - to see a village girl marry a hometown boy, and to share in all of the joy and happiness of "their" day. Since June is the traditional month for weddings, this text seemed appropriate for today.

DEVELOPMENT First-off, this episode at the marriage feast in Cana offers us a gentle hint of how God comes to us. So often it's not in the impressive, showy things, but rather in the humble, homespun, happy events of life. Jesus there in the home of the common people...is there anything more important than that? Home is the heart of society - the little world where first we prepare for the problems of the big world. And I believe that what happens in our homes has more to do with the Kingdom of God than what happens in temples, or palaces or the halls of Congress.

A religion which does not tell on our home life and make us thoughtful and kind and unselfish there really isn't much of a religion. I saw that delightful movie "Harry and Tonto" this week. Have you seen it? It brought to mind that comment, "If a man has religion, even his cat and dog know it".

Jesus began His ministry at a wedding feast that was held in a home. And it was there He proceeded to perform His first miracle, changing water into wine.

JESUS WAS THERE Now there's another thought that leaps out at us arrestingly as we move toward the main point of this Gospel incident. It's the simple fact that Jesus was there; that they wanted Him to be there; that they had no fear that He would be out of His element, or fail to fit in, or make others feel uncomfortable, as John the Baptist, with his ascetism, would probably have done.

Fun, gaiety, happiness, laughter, music, rejoicing, people making merry - and Jesus was there, at the heart of it all. I'm sure there was no awkward silence at that part of the table where he sat. He did not hold aloof from human happiness. Some feel 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 vice-versa. Who was it who said: "The rock bound coast of Maine felt like an amateur when it saw how grim the Pilgrim fathers were". By His presence at this joyous wedding feast, I would like to believe that Jesus was suggesting that laughter and the pleasures of life are as much a part of the Kingdom of God as its conflicts and trials and challenges.

"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, 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 first miracle performed by our Lord was done so in order to heighten the joy and happiness of a home.

SHORT OF WINE Everyone was having a good time, but then something happened. Whispering....growing embarrassment....something was going wrong. Things can go wrong at weddings. Miscalculations and mistakes can occur. I've seen it happen more than once.

I'll never forget the time a soloist was singing the Lord's Prayer at a beautiful wedding and suddenly as he moved toward the high notes, he forgot the words. Talk about embarrassment. And then there was the wedding where the bride fainted right here at the altar of the Church just as I asked her the question: "Wilt thou have this man to be thy wedded husband?" She swooned gracefully and went down. I said to the groom, "we better do something". We picked her up and carried her over to the pew...stretched her out. My next question was, "Is there a doctor present?" There wasn't. We finally got one. Got her over to Doctor's Hospital and she never did get to answer that question, "Wilt thou have this man...".

The unexpected can happen. But back to the wedding feast at Cana. They say that a servant came over and whispered something in the ear of the bride's mother and her face flushed red. Something had happened in the kitchen. Yes, it happens. We husbands know, for we've felt the glance from the other end of the table when the company wonders why we suddenly stopped urging another helping....or perhaps a kick under the table.

It happens in the best of families, but never with quite so much humiliation as to the mother of the bride, right at the proudest moment of all. The strain had been too much on the family pocketbook; there was no more wine. Call it pride, if you will. But, there was no more wine to serve the guests who were still arriving at the door of the home. And there was Jesus, with His disciples, and so many friends mixing and mingling...having such a good time...no more wine!

WATER INTO WINE Jesus stepped in and saved the day. He turned the water into wine and the marriage feast continued on an even higher note of joy and happiness.

Water into wine. It's amazing what some people can wangle out of that line, how it can become a defense for "boozing it up" in the minds of some, providing Biblical sanction for what goes on in some places that we won't mention here this morning. Water was scarced in that land and native wine was what the people drank - the fruit of the vineyard. Nonone got intoxicated on it; at least it would take a heap of it. And knowing Jesus as we do - his dislike, his hatred of all that injures, harms and destroys human life, knowing Jesus as we do, it takes a great stretch of the mind to turn this incident, as some would, into a sanction for what has now become the cause of our nation's number one illness.

I'm not going to dwell on how He changed the water into wine. To me, that's not the important thing. Some there are who enjoy fastening all of their attention on the "how" of a Biblical miracle, trying their best to explain it, and end up missing the glory of the whole thing. Personally, I've always responded to what Walt Whitman said in this regard,

"....that to the reverent mind the whole world is full of miracle and mystery..."

I see nothing but miracle all around. And pity that person, who balking at one miracle, misses the great wonder of all that is around him. For every day, right before our eyes, God is performing miracles: a rose opening its petals, a baby being born, a seed pushing up to the light of day to become a tree. There are miracles all around us. All we need to do is stop and behold them.

IMPORTANT THING

The important thing - the impressive thing - in this incident is not the miracle itself - the changing of water into wine - but rather it is that truth to which the miracle is pointing, reminding us that divine purpose, divine element runs through all the events of life...woven into the fabric..

I believe it suggest to us that there is an eternal goodness that does stand ready to take over right at the point where our human energies and resources fail. You might say that our wine is always running out. That is, we often come to the end of our human resources. And then it is that the great miracle occurs, we find new wine poured into the vessels we call our lives, new energies just when we thought we were running low and couldn't keep it together any longer.

This miracle sums up in a beautiful way what the Gospel is all about: how our Lord enters into the troubles of people; how unbelievably He suffices in every difficulty; and above all, how He enriches things for all of us.

What water is to wine, what that embarrassing insufficiency was to the relief He wrought for His hosts - so is any other life compared to the fullness, the peace, the adventure, the achievement that He gives to all who walk His way!

The question I direct to you is this: when your wine runs out, when you come to the end of your powers - where and to whom do you turn?

THE CLIMAX

And now we move quickly to the climax of this episode. When the ruler of the feast - we'd call him the "MC" - tasted the wine, he paused and with astonishment on his face and in his voice looked in the direction of the bridegroom and said with great surprise, "you have kept the good wine until now!" According to Emily or Amy, the good wine, the best wine, was served first and the poor wine was brought out later. "Sir, you have kept the good wine until now".

I wonder why John, the Gospel writer, makes a point of this. Perhaps there was flashing through his mystic, oriental mind a larger truth than the words suggest. I wonder if he was having the ruler of the feast give expression to a great truth, a great insight: the eternal contrast between the ways of the world and the way of Christ. 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...and then afterwards that which is not so good. That's the way the world does it.

Remember the Prodigal Son? When he went running off with his inheritance to the "far-off" country, he wasn't giving much thought to the "afterwards". He had no idea that he'd end up making a mess of things. It's an old story, as old as the Garden of Eden....the allurements of the sensual, the enticement of things, the deception of glamour, the betrayal of the senses, the disillusionment that eventually comes from violating time-tested standards and codes of behavior. And so many there are today having tried to feed their hungry appetites on the thrills of life, taking off on their little "ego-trips", not facing the "afterwards"... bored....cynical....fed-up....washed-up...making the rounds from doctor to lawyer to beauty parlor to psychiatrist to minister...wanting to know "what's the matter"....why the wine of life seems to have lost its taste, gone sour. They've never opened up their hearts to anything outside of themselves, and now they find they can't get away from their own small selves into life's larger interests and more satisfying pursuits.

THE GLORY OF CHRIST Here again, friends, is the "glory" of Christ, and of all that He has come to represent. The wine of life He serves does not lose its taste. "I am come" He said, "that they might have life and have it abundantly". He spoke of "eternal life" - a life that has lasting meaning. It's a life that transcends the narrow confines of the self, a life above the physical, a real kingdom of mind and of spirit. It's in that realm where the real riches of life are found, riches that can't diminish, of which the years cannot rob us, riches....which only serve to ripen and enhance. That's where the real wine is. "The last of life" said the poet, Browning, "for which the first was made". "Our times are in His hand"

Yes, I believe that the Gospel writer who penned this beautiful scene knew of the glory that Christ brings with Him, and offers to us even now to anyone who will accept it from Him. It is a life that is abundant, and it does provide a peace that passes all human understanding, and it does bring a fullness of joy that produces an astonishment in its recipients akin to that of the bewilderment of the steward of the feast who said, "Sir, you have kept the good wine 'till now....the best wine 'till the end".

And always....its people keep bursting in on us...eyes shining, hearts on fire, crying through tears of joy:

"We've found it....we've tasted it....the thing for which the whole world has been seeking...and it is good....and it works. Do you go down before your temptations? So did we, but not now, with this wonderful Saviour to guide us through. Do you find life too difficult for you? So did we, but not now, with the amplitudes of grace there for us in Christ. Is life thin...pinched...hard....or tame for you? With Christ and in Christ, it grows satisfying and successful and exciting beyond measure, beyond description, becoming another and a richer thing".

Lay hold then for yourself on this "eternal life" which He still brings. It is the best wine of all, providing life with a flavor, a taste of God's spirit. Let it be in your heart, your home, and let it be poured out into the life of your week-day. God's gift. Christ's spirit...in our world.

PRAYER Grant us, O God, such a vision of thy truth, thy beauty that we may taste of the abundant life, find its peace that passes human understanding, and a joy that transcends all other the other thrills of life. Amen

PRAYER

We thank Thee, O God, for the joy that has come into our lives through Christ Jesus.

May we never forget that religion without that joy is not His religion; and as we live and grow in it, may we not forget that ours is the privilege of taking that joy and peace into the lives of others.

We ask this in the spirit and name of Him who came to give us the abundant life, and turned the water of life into wine. Amen