

Second Sunday after Epiphany;

John 2:1-11

The Wedding in Cana of Galilee;

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And the third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee; the mother of Jesus was there: And both Jesus was called, and his disciples, to the marriage. And when they wanted wine, the mother of Jesus saith unto him, They have no wine. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come. His mother saith unto the servants, Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it. And there were set there six waterpots of stone, after the manner of the purifying of the Jews, containing two or three firkins apiece. Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the brim. And he saith unto them, Draw out now, and bear unto the governor of the feast. And they bare it. When the ruler of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and knew not whence it was: (but the servants which drew the water knew;) the governor of the feast called the bridegroom, And saith unto him, Every man at the beginning doth set forth good wine; and when men have well drunk, then that which is worse: but thou hast kept the good wine until now. This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.

1. Enough has been written heretofore on marriage; hence we leave that subject for the present, and treat the following three topics in this Gospel text: first, the consolation this history affords married people by virtue of their marriage; secondly, the faith and love revealed in this Gospel lesson; thirdly, the spiritual significance of this marriage.

I. THE CONSOLATION OF MARRIED PEOPLE AND THE GLORY OF THE MARRIED STATE.

2. In the first place, it is indeed a high honor paid to married life for Christ himself to attend this marriage, together with his mother and his disciples. Moreover, his mother is present as the one arranging the wedding, the parties married being apparently her poor relatives or neighbors, and she being compelled to act as the bride's mother; so of course, it was nothing more than a wedding, and in no way a display. For Christ lived up to his doctrine, not going to the rich, but to the poor; or, if he does go to the great and rich, he is sure to rebuke and reprove, coming away with disfavor, earning small thanks at their hands, with no thought of honoring them with a miracle as he does here.

3. Now the second honor is his giving good wine for the poor marriage by means of a great miracle, making himself the bride's chief cup-bearer; it may be too that he had no money or jewel to give as a wedding present. He never did such honor to the life or doings of the Pharisees; for by this miracle he confirms marriage as the work and institution of God, no matter how common or how lowly it appears in the eyes of men, God none the less acknowledges his own work and loves it. Even our Caiaphases themselves have often declared and preached that marriage was the only state instituted by God. Who then instituted the others? Certainly not God, but the devil by means of men; yet they shun, reject and revile this state, and deem themselves so holy that they not only themselves avoid marriage – though they need it and ought to marry – but from excess of holiness they will not even attend a marriage, being much holier than Christ himself who as an unholy sinner attends a wedding.

4. Since then marriage has the foundation and consolation that it is instituted by God and that God loves it, and that Christ himself so honors and comforts it, everybody ought to prize and esteem it, and the heart ought to be glad, that it is surely the state God loves and cheerfully endure every burden in it, even though the burdens be ten times heavier than they are. For this is the reason there is so much care and unpleasantness in marriage to the outward man, because everything that is God's Word and work, if it is to be blessed at all, must be distasteful, bitter and burdensome to the outward man. On this account marriage is a state that cultivates, and exercises faith in God and love to our neighbor by means of manifold cares, labors, unpleasantnesses, crosses and all kinds of adversities, that are to follow everything that is God's Word and work. All this the chaste whore-mongers, saintly effeminate and Sodomites nicely escape, serving God outside of God's ordinance by doings of their own.

5. For this is what Christ also indicates by his readiness to supply any want arising in marriage, bestowing wine where it is needed, and making it of water; as though he would say: Must you drink water, that is, suffer affliction outwardly, and is this distasteful?

Very well, I will sweeten it for you and change the water into wine, so that your affliction will be your joy and delight. I will not do this by taking the water away or having it poured out; it shall remain, yea, I will have it poured in and the vessels filled up to the brim. For I will not deprive Christian marriage of its cares and trials, but rather add to it. The thing shall be wondrous, so that none, except they themselves who experience it, shall understand it. It shall be on this wise:

6. God's Word shall do it, by which all things are made, preserved and transformed; that Word which turns your water into wine, and distasteful marriage into delight. That God has instituted marriage (Gen 2, 32) the heathen and unbelievers do not know, therefore their water remains water and never becomes wine; for they feel not God's pleasure and delight in married life, which if they did feel they would experience such delight in my pleasure as not to feel the half of their affliction, feeling it outwardly only, but inwardly not at all. And this would be the way to turn water into wine, mixing my pleasure with your displeasure and placing the one against the other, so that my pleasure would drown your displeasure, and turn it into pleasure; but this pleasure of mine nothing will reveal and give to you except my Word, Gen 1, 31: *"God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good."*

7. Here too Christ indicates that he is not displeased with a marriage feast, nor with the things belonging to a wedding such as adornments, cheerfulness, eating and drinking, according to the usage and custom of the country; which appear to be superfluous and needless expense and a worldly matter; only so far as these things are used in moderation and in keeping with a marriage. For the bride and groom must be adorned; so also the guests must eat and drink to be cheerful. And such dining and doing may all be done in good conscience; for the Scriptures occasionally report the like, even the Gospel lessons mentioning bridal adornment, the wedding garment, guests and feastings at weddings. Thus Abraham's servant in Gen 24, 53 presents ornaments of gold and silver to Rebecca, the bride of Isaac, and to her brothers; so that in these things no one need pay attention to the sour-visaged hypocrites and self-constituted saints who are pleased with nothing but what they themselves do and teach, and will not suffer a maid to wear a wreath or to adorn herself at all.

8. God is not concerned about such external things, if only faith and love reign; provided, as already stated, it be in moderation and in accord with each person's station. For this marriage, although it was poor and small, had three tables; which is indicated by the word Architriclinus, showing that the ruler of the feast had three tables to provide for; moreover, the groom did not himself attend to this office, but had servants; then too there was wine to drink; all of which, if poverty were to be urged, might have been dispensed with, as is frequently the case with us. So also the guests did not merely quench their thirst with the wine; for the ruler of the feast speaks of how the good wine ought first to

be set on, then, when men have freely drunk, that which is worse. All this Christ allows to pass, and we likewise should let it pass and not make it a matter of conscience. They were not of the devil, even if a few drank of the wine a little beyond what thirst required, and became merry; else you would have to blame Christ for being the cause by means of his presence, and his mother by asking for it; so that both Christ and his mother are sinners in this if the sour-visaged saints are to render judgment.

9. But the excess customary in our times is a different thing, where men do not eat and drink but gorge themselves with food and drink, revel and carouse, and act as though it were a sign of skill or strength to consume overmuch: where, moreover, the intention is not to be merry, but to be full and crazy. But these are swine, not men; to such Christ would not give wine, nor would he visit them. So also in the matter of dress, it is not the marriage that is kept in mind, but display and pomp; as though the most admirable were those most able to wear gold, silver and pearls, and to spoil much silk and broadcloth, which even asses might do and switches.

10. What then is moderation? Reason should teach that, and cite examples from other countries and cities where such pomp and excess are unknown. But to give my opinion, I would say a farmer is well adorned if for his wedding he have clothes twice as fine as he daily wears at his work; a burgher likewise; and a nobleman, if he have garments twice as costly as a townsman; a count, twice as costly as a nobleman; a duke, twice as costly as a count, and so in due order. In like manner food and drink and the entertainment of guests should be governed by their social position, and the purpose of the table should be pleasure not debauchery.

11. Now is it a sin to play and dance at a wedding, inasmuch as some declare great sin is caused by dancing? Whether the Jews had dances I do not know; but since it is the custom of the country, like inviting guests, decorating, eating and drinking and being merry, I see no reason to condemn it, save its excess when it goes beyond decency and moderation. That sin should be committed is not the fault of dancing alone; since at a table or in church that may happen; even as it is not the fault of eating that some while so engaged should turn themselves into swine. Where things are decently conducted I will not interfere with the marriage rites and customs, and dance and never mind. Faith and love cannot be driven away either by dancing or by sitting still, as long as you keep to decency and moderation. Young children certainly dance without sin; do the same also, and be a child, then dancing will not harm you. Otherwise were dancing a sin in itself, children should not be allowed to dance. This is sufficient concerning marriage.

II. THE DOCTRINE AND EXAMPLE OF LOVE AND OF FAITH

12. In the second place, to return to our Gospel lesson, we here see the example of love in Christ and his mother. The mother renders service and takes the part of housekeeper: Christ honors the occasion by his personal presence, by a miracle and a gift. And all this is for the benefit of the groom, the bride and the guests, as is the nature of love and its works. Thus Christ lures all hearts to himself, to rely on him as ever ready to help, even in temporal things, and never willing to forsake any; so that all who believe in him shall not suffer want, be it in spiritual or temporal things; rather must water become wine, and every creature turned into the thing his believer needs. He who believes must have sufficient, and no one can prevent it.

13. But the example of faith is still more wonderful in this Gospel. Christ waits to the very last moment when the want is felt by all present, and there is no counsel or help left. This shows the way of divine grace; it is not imparted to one who still has enough, and has not yet felt his need. For grace does not feed the full and satiated, but the hungry, as we have often said. Whoever still deems himself wise, strong and pious, and finds something good in himself, and is not yet a poor, miserable, sick sinner and fool, the same cannot come to Christ the Lord, nor receive his grace.

14. But whenever the need is felt, he does not at once hasten and bestow what is needed and desired, but delays and tests our faith and trust, even as he does here; yea, what is still more severe, he acts as though he would not help at all, but speaks with harshness and austerity. This you observe in the case of his mother. She feels the need and tells him of it, desiring his help and counsel in a humble and polite request. For she does not say: My dear son, furnish us with wine, but: "They have no wine." Thus she merely touches his kindness, of which she is fully assured. As though she would say: He is so good and gracious, there is no need of my asking, I will only tell him what is lacking, and he will of his own accord do more than one could ask, This is the way of faith, it pictures God's goodness to itself in this manner, never doubting but that it is really so; therefore it makes bold to bring its petition and to present its need.

15. But see, how unkindly he turns away the humble request of his mother who addresses him with such great confidence. Now observe the nature of faith. What has it to rely on? Absolutely nothing, all is darkness. It feels its need and sees help nowhere; in addition, God turns against it like a stranger and does not recognize it, so that absolutely nothing is left. It is the same way with our conscience when we feel our sin and the lack of righteousness; or in the agony of death when we feel the lack of life; or in the dread of hell when eternal salvation seems to have left us. Then indeed there is humble longing and knocking, prayer and

search, in order to be rid of sin, death and dread. And then he acts as if he had only begun to show us our sins, as if death were to continue, and hell never to cease. Just as he here treats his mother, by his refusal making the need greater and more distressing than it was before she came to him with her request; for now it seems everything is lost, since the one support on which she relied in her need is also gone.

16. This is where faith stands in the heat of battle. Now observe how his mother acts and here becomes our teacher. However harsh his words sound, however unkind he appears, she does not in her heart interpret this as anger, or as the opposite of kindness, but adheres firmly to the conviction that he is kind, refusing to give up this opinion because of the thrust she received, and unwilling to dishonor him in her heart by thinking him to be otherwise than kind and gracious – as they do who are without faith, who fall back at the first shock and think of God merely according to what they feel, like the horse and the mule, Ps 32, 9. For if Christ's mother had allowed those harsh words to frighten her she would have gone away silently and displeased; but in ordering the servants to do what he might tell them she proves that she has overcome the rebuff and still expects of him nothing but kindness.

17. What do you think of the hellish blow, when a man in his distress, especially in the highest distress of conscience, receives the rebuff, that he feels God declaring to him: "What have I to do with thee?" Quid mihi et tibi? He must needs faint and despair, unless he knows and understands the nature of such acts of God, and is experienced in faith. For he will act just as he feels, and will not think of God in a different way and mean the words. Feeling nothing but wrath and hearing nothing but indignation, he will consider God only as his enemy and angry judge. But just as he thinks God to be so will he find him. Thus he will expect nothing good from him. That is to renounce God with all his goodness. The result is that he flees and hates him, and will not have God to be God; and every other blasphemy that is the fruit of unbelief.

18. Hence the highest thought in this Gospel lesson, and it must ever be kept in mind, is, that we honor God as being good and gracious, even if he acts and speaks otherwise, and all our understanding and feeling be otherwise. For in this way feeling is killed, and the old man perishes, so that nothing but faith in God's goodness remains, and no feeling. For here you see how his mother retains a free faith and holds it forth as an example to us. She is certain that he will be gracious, although she does not feel it. She is certain also that she feels otherwise than she believes. Therefore she freely leaves and commends all to his goodness, and fixes for him neither time nor place, neither manner nor measure, neither person nor name. He is to act when it pleases him. If not in the midst of the feast, then at the end of it, or after the feast. My defeat I will swallow, his scorning me, letting me stand in disgrace before all the guests, speaking so unkindly to me, causing us all to

blush for shame. He acts tart, but he is sweet I know. Let us proceed in the same way, then we are true Christians.

19. Here note how severely he deals with his own mother, teaching us thereby not only the example of faith mentioned above, but confirming that in things pertaining to God and his service we are to know neither father nor mother, as Moses writes in Deut 33,9: "He who says of his father and of his mother, I know them not, observes thy Word, Israel." For although there is no higher authority on earth than that of father and mother, still this ends when God's Word and work begin. For in divine things neither father nor mother, still less a bishop or any other person, only God's Word is to teach and guide. And if father and mother were to order, teach, or even beg you to do anything for God, and in his service that he has not clearly ordered and commanded, you are to reply: Quid mihi et tibi? What have I and you to do with each other? In this same way Christ here refuses absolutely to do God's work when his own mother wants it.

20. For father and mother are in duty bound, yea, God made them father and mother for this very purpose, not to teach and lead their children to God according to their own notions and devotion, but according to God's command; as St. Paul declares in Eph 6, 4: "Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but nurture them in the chastening and admonition of the Lord;" i. e. teach them God's command and Word, as you were taught, and not notions of your own. Thus in this Gospel lesson you see the mother of Christ directing the servants away from herself unto Christ, telling them not: Whatsoever I say unto you, do it; but: "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it." To this Word alone you must direct everyone, if You would direct aright; so that this word of Mary (whatsoever he saith, do it) is, and ought to be, a daily saying in Christendom, destroying all doctrines of men and everything not really Christ's Word. And we ought firmly to believe that what is imposed upon us over and above God's Word is not, as they boast and lie, the commandment of the church. For Mary says: Whatsoever he saith that, that, that do, and that alone; for in it there will be enough to do.

21. Here also you see, how faith does not fail, God does not permit that, but gives more abundantly and gloriously than we ask. For here not merely wine is given, but excellent and good wine, and a great quantity of it. By this he again entices and allures us to believe confidently in him, though be delay. For he is truthful and cannot deny himself; he is good and gracious, that he must of himself confess and in addition prove it, unless we hinder him and refuse him time and place and the means to do so. At last he cannot forsake his work, as little as he can forsake himself – if only we can hold out until his hour comes.

III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS MARRIAGE.

22. In the third place, we must briefly touch upon the spiritual significance of the text. This marriage and every marriage signifies Christ, the true bridegroom, and Christendom, the bride; as the Gospel lesson of Mt 22, 1-14 sufficiently shows.

23. This marriage took place in Cana of Galilee; that is, Christendom began in the days of Christ among the Jewish people, and continues still among all who are like the Jews. The Jewish nation is called Cana, which signifies zeal, because it diligently practised the Law and zealously clung to the works of the Law, so that even the Gospel lessons always call the Jews zealots, and especially St. Paul in Rom 9 and 10. It is natural too that wherever Law and good works are, there zeal will be and contention, one claiming to be better than the other, first of all, however, opposing faith which cares naught for works and boasts only of God's grace. Now wherever Christ is there such zealots will always be, and his marriage must be at Zeal City, for you always find by the side of the Gospel and faith work-righteous people and Jewish zealots who quarrel with faith.

24. Galilee signifies border or the edge of the country, where you pass from one country into another. This signifies the same people in Zeal City who dwell between the Law and the Gospel, and ought to emigrate and pass from works to faith, from the Law into the Christian liberty; as some also have done, and now still do. But the greater part remain in their works and dwell on the border, achieving neither good works nor faith, shielding themselves behind the shine and glitter of works.

25. Christ's being bidden to the marriage signifies that he was promised long ago in the Law and the prophets and is earnestly expected and invoked to turn water into wine, fulfil the Law and establish faith, and make true Galileans of us.

26. His disciples are bidden with him; for he is expected to be a great King, hence to need apostles and disciples in order to have his Word freely and fully preached everywhere. Likewise, his mother is the Christian church, taken from the Jews, who herself most of all belongs to the marriage, for Christ was really promised to the Jewish nation.

27. The six waterpots of stone, for the purification of the Jews, are the books of the Old Testament which by law and commandment made the Jewish people only outwardly pious and pure; for which reason the Evangelist says, they were set there after the Jews' manner of purifying, as if to say: This signifies the purification by works without faith, which never purifies the heart, but only makes it more impure; which is a Jewish, not a Christian or spiritual purification.

28. There being six waterpots signifies the labor and toil which they who deal in works undergo in such purification; for the heart finds no rest in them, since the Sabbath, the

seventh day, is wanting, in which we rest from our works and let God work in us. For there are six work-days, in which God created heaven and earth, and commanded us to labor. The seventh day is the day of rest, in which we are not to toil in the works of the Law, but to let God work in us by faith, while we remain quiet and enjoy a holiday from the labors of the Law.

29. The water in the pots is the contents and substance of the Law by which conscience is governed, and is graven in letters as in the waterpots of stone.

30. And they are of stone, as were the tables of Moses, signifying the stiff-necked people of the Jews. For as their heart is set against the Law, so the Law appears outwardly to be against them. It seems hard and difficult to them, and therefore it is hard and difficult; the reason in that their heart is hard and averse to the Law; we all find, feel and discover by experience that we are hard and averse to what is good, and soft and prone to what is evil. This the wicked do not feel, but those who long to be pious and labor exceedingly with their works. This is the significance of the two or three firkins apiece.

31. To turn water into wine is to render the interpretation of the Law delightful. This is done as follows: Before the Gospel arrives everyone understands the Law as demanding our works, that we must fulfil it with works of our own. This interpretation begets either hardened, presumptuous dissemblers and hypocrites, harder than any pot of stone, or timid, restless consciences. There remains nothing but water in the pot, fear and dread of God's judgment. This is the water-interpretation, not intended for drinking, neither filling any with delight; on the contrary, there is nothing to it but washing and purification, and yet no true inner cleansing. But the Gospel explains the Law, showing that it requires more than we can render, and that it demands a person different from ourselves to fulfil it; that is, it demands Christ and brings us unto him, so that first of all by his grace we are made in true faith a different people like unto Christ, and that then we do truly good works. Thus the right interpretation and significance of the law is to lead us to the knowledge of our helplessness, to drive us from ourselves to another, namely to Christ, to seek grace and help of him.

32. Therefore, when Christ wanted to make wine he had them pour in still more water, up to the very brim. For the Gospel comes and renders the interpretation of the Law perfectly clear (as already stated), showing that what belongs to us is nothing but sin; wherefore by the law we cannot escape sinning. When now the two or three firkins hear this, namely the good hearts who have labored according to the law in good works, and are already timid at heart and troubled in conscience, this interpretation adds greatly to their fear and terror; and the water now threatens to rise above the lid and brim. Before this, while they felt disinclined and averse to what is good, they still imagined they might yet succeed by their good works; now they hear that they are altogether unfit and

helpless, and that it is impossible to gain their end by good works. That overfills the pot with water, it cannot hold more. This is to interpret the Law in the highest manner, leaving nothing but despair.

33. Then comes the consoling Gospel and turns the water into wine. For when the heart hears that Christ fulfils the law for us and takes our sin upon himself, it no longer cares that impossible things are demanded by the Law, that we must despair of rendering them, and must give up our good works. Yea, it is an excellent thing, and delectable, that the Law is so deep and high, so holy and righteous and good, and demands things so great; and it is loved and lauded for making so many and such great demands. This is because the heart now has in Christ all that the Law demands, and it would be sorry indeed if it demanded less. Behold, thus the Law is delightful now and easy which before was disagreeable, difficult and impossible; for it lives in the heart by the Spirit. Water no longer is in the pots, it has turned to wine, it is passed to the guest, it is consumed, and has made the heart glad.

34. And these servants are all preachers of the New Testament like the apostles and their successors.

35. The drawing and passing to the guests is, to take this interpretation from the Scriptures, and to preach it to all the world, which is bidden to Christ's marriage.

36. And these servants knew (the Evangelist tells us) whence the wine was, how it had been water. For the apostles and their successors alone understand how the law becomes delightful and pleasant through Christ, and how the Gospel by faith does not fulfil the Law by works, everything being unchanged from what it formerly was in good works.

37. But the ruler of the feast does indeed taste that the wine is good, yet he knows not whence it is. This ruler of the feast is the old priesthood among the Jews who knew of naught but works, of whom Nicodemus was one, Jn 3,9; he indeed feels how fine this cause of Christ would be, but knows not how it can be, and why it is so, clinging still to works. For they who teach works cannot understand and apprehend the Gospel and the actions of faith.

38. He calleth the bridegroom and reproacheth him for setting on the good wine last, whereas every man setteth on last that which is worse. To this very day it is the surprise of the Jews that the preaching of the Gospel should have been delayed so long, coming first of all now to the Gentiles, while they are said to have been drinking the worse wine for so long a time, bearing so long the burden and heat of the day under the Law; as is set forth in another Gospel lesson. Mt 20,12.

39. Observe, God and men proceed in contrary ways. Men set on first that which is best, afterward that which is worse. God first gives the cross and affliction, then honor and blessedness. This is because men seek to preserve the old man; on which account they instruct us to keep the Law by works, and offer promises great and sweet. But the outcome is stale, the result has a vile taste; for the longer it goes on the worse is the condition of conscience, although, being intoxicated with great promises, it does not feel its wretchedness; yet at last when the wine is digested, and the false promises gone, the wretchedness appears. But God first of all terrifies the conscience, sets on miserable wine, in fact nothing but water; then, however, he consoles us with the promises of the Gospel which endure forever.

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