

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

January 20, 2019

John 2:1-11

LSB Lectionary, Series C

Did our Lord affirm the goodness of wine at Cana? Naturally. Did he speak his approval upon holy matrimony? More surely. But above all, by both attending a nuptial feast and there performing his first sign of our salvation, Christ did nothing less than to announce his divinity as the Bridegroom of Israel. By mere presence and by miracle, he manifested himself as the very Lord who through ancient prophets had often spoken of the covenant with his chosen nation as a marriage.

Nor should we Christians view this theme as a relic, a charming motif to be appreciated in our study of the Old Testament. What was true then is true today at our weddings: Every time a bridegroom and bride speak their vows, and those present invoke the blessing of heaven upon the couple, God is once again sending to us a signal of his own will for all of us. As a man desires to take a woman as his wife, the Lord God yearns to join himself to us sinners in a covenant of love.

Now, to speak in such a way does require that we humans believe ourselves to be more than highly sophisticated animals. Lower animals, after all, cross paths and mate; they, too, produce offspring and raise their young. Has it ever occurred to you that, compared strictly in terms of outward behavior, there are mourning doves whose unions have last longer than some of the marriages on record in the Sedgwick County courthouse?

But God does not measure us, nor should we compare ourselves, against birds or bears or any other beast. For God made Adam and Eve to be something far greater than flesh and blood or even brains. He made us in his image, endowed us not only the capacity but also the impulse to communicate with him. We are fashioned from the dust, yes, but so fashioned by God to receive his holy Word and understand it, to hear his voice and respond to it.

This higher nature gives the opportunity and the power to praise and glorify him, and to please him or to anger him. This is why, when he gives to men and women the opportunity to become one flesh – which outwardly resembles what lower creatures can do – it is our whole selves to whom marriage is offered. Holy matrimony happens when man and woman, both aware of being made in God's image, each discovers how alike and yet not alike God has made them for each

other. And so such we find that the love between us is unlike any other love that we experience on earth.

However, God then reveals to us that such a yearning and delight is not unlike any other. Such a profound union actually gives us a picture of what can take place and grow between us and God. And just as the words and actions of Christ at Cana pointed back to the prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others; Cana also pointed forward to what Christ would teach his church. You would be hard-pressed to find a teaching more counter-cultural in its day than these words to Roman-era males:

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her... so that he might present the church to himself in splendor... Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies, just as Christ does the church... because we are members of his body.

When a man and woman approach the altar to speak their vows, the thought that their marriage corresponds to the covenant into which God brings us for our salvation. For he is holy and we are unclean. God is mighty and we are weak. God is love toward everyone and everything, while we are sinners who cannot get past loving ourselves above all. It is enough for any couple considering marriage to look at the holiness of the Lord for his church and to declare in resignation, "Well, we can never live up to that!"

But Christ did not attend this wedding to reveal such holy love and glory that we sinners would shrink back and declare, "We could never live up to that." Jesus visited Cana that day as the Lord of Grace; when his hosts declared, "No more wine!" and he answered with the very finest wine in abundance, he was pre-figuring God's forgiveness and restoration of his fallen people, the re-gift of life for which Jesus had been sent to pour forth his blood from the cross.

The fruit of his death, the wine of life for wives and husbands, is the power of forgiveness in his name. The Gospel can work wonders in the midst of an awful crisis, the worst of moments, in a marriage.

If you look up those prophecies that I mentioned before – the passages in which the Lord looks upon Israel as his beloved bride – you discover one very important fact: God really began to speak to his people that way after they had broken the covenant. It was after they had forfeited all claim to his favor, when the only thing they deserved from him was annihilation, that the Lord spoke

through Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah to let them know that their bond to him was not yet broken. Their lack of faith, their pursuit of idols, and the moral bankruptcy it produced awakened his anger, but it was the anger of a jealous spouse who still loved his chosen bride.

What a delightful paradox, and one so filled with hope for men and women! Here the couple imagined they had invited Mary's son to celebrate what was their wedding; little did they realize it was the Lord, the Bridegroom of Israel, who was inviting them to place their vows and their very bodies under the nuptial canopy of God's promise of a life that not even sin can destroy. ✠