

***Sign of the New Age to Come***  
***John 2:1-11***  
***January 13, 2019***

The wedding at Cana is an important event in the life and ministry of Jesus. John tells us that it was the first of the signs, or miracles, Jesus did. Jesus and a few of his disciples, joined by his mother and possibly his siblings, are invited to the wedding feast. The host family is probably related to Mary, or at least they are close family friends. Cana, like Nazareth, was a small, rural village about four miles northeast across the hills from Nazareth and sheltered from the Roman garrison at Sepphoris, the most prosperous town in the region. Like Nazareth the homes in Cana would have been made of mud and stone around courtyards with easy access to the fields. Sheep, goats and perhaps a few cattle might be roaming around. This was not like the bucolic villages of Southern England some of us may have visited, but a fairly rustic, poor and simple village.

Jewish weddings were big celebrations that went on for several days of feasting, drinking and dancing. Jewish custom set Wednesday for the wedding of a virgin. Jesus would have entered the courtyard and greeted his mother and brothers. *Rabbi* they would have greeted the somewhat gaunt Jesus and kissed him on the lips. There would be music of flutes, harps and drums providing the beat for the dancing as the wedding party entered the courtyard. An elder read the Jewish ceremony, led the singing of Psalms, and perhaps read portions of Song of Solomon. After the couple danced their first dance the feast would begin. Beginning in the late morning the people would be well fed by evening and perhaps even a little tipsy. Then disaster struck. The wine ran out!

Now we would simply run to the wine store and buy a case or two. But in this time and place running out of wine too early isn't a little embarrassing, it's a disaster. Wine isn't just a social lubricant, it's a sign of the harvest, of God's abundance, of joy and gladness and hospitality. And so when they run short on wine they run short on blessing. The wine has run out before the wedding has. And it's a catastrophe.

Jesus' mother offers a suggestion to her son: "*They have no wine*". Now, we don't know whether she was close to the families of the bride and groom and so eager to help, or whether she just was particularly sensitive to this kind of social *disaster*. Jesus responds rather bluntly in the English translation: *Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?* One would love to get the facial expressions in this exchange: possibly eyebrows raised, serious facial expression perhaps on the mother's part. But we don't. All we have is the reported words, which the Greek may be something like, "this has nothing to do with us." Then he offers the deeper theological reason why he is reluctant to do anything about it. His time has not come yet. Or as John's gospel expresses it often:

*my hour has not yet come.* But Jesus changes his mind.

Jesus asked them to fill the large stone water jars that are used for ritual washing. These hold around 20 gallons each; that's over a hundred gallons of water. Once filled, he changed the water into wine, and not just any wine, but the very best wine. With the first of his "many signs" he demonstrated that somehow and in some unsurpassed manner he revealed the glory and character of God like no other.

The Cana story reminds me of the Danish film *Babette's Feast*, which won a 1988 Academy Award for the best foreign film.

The story unfolds in the late nineteenth century in a small fishing village on the dreary Jutland coast of Denmark. Two sisters have given up their own ambitions to care for their father, an elderly pastor of a stern and tiny church. Their band of dour Christians learn the meaning of God's extravagant grace from a most unlikely source when a French refugee named Babette invades their small world. In a highly symbolic act, Babette, who was a famous chef in Paris, has won a lottery and decides to spend it on the villagers. So she orders in from France the best wine, the most amazing cuts of meat and vegetables. She cooks the villagers a sumptuous feast. At first the villagers can't allow themselves to enjoy such extravagance. But they loosen up and learn to accept the gift and enjoy the celebration, excess, and the best wine. Through the meal they are transformed.

I think we need to reflect deeply on what it is that Jesus offers in this story of the wedding at Cana. Notice John lets us know that this happened on the third day! Why tell us that? Was it not on the third day that he rose again and a new age was ushered in? This miracle of wine from water, speaks to us of abundance and new life. His hour had not yet arrived, but this was the first of the signs of John's Gospel signifying what was to come. The stone jars designated for ceremonial washing have become containers of the rich wine of the new age Jesus will usher in. Water as a means of purification is written all over chapters two and three in John's Gospel. The washing of the waters of baptism by John and Jesus, as well as this reference to the jars of purification, is surely not accidental in this story. By taking these jars and using them to contain his miracle wine Jesus is sending out a strong message that their use as bearers of the old covenant purification rite has been superseded by the wine of the new age.

One might be tempted to see Jesus as the new Dionysus or as he was known to the Romans, Bacchus. For Romans and Greeks wine was a sign of life and blessing of the gods. It is a sign in this story of who this Jesus really is, as well as a symbol of the new age. It speaks to us of our human thirst for spiritual connection, which ultimately can only be satisfied by a living relationship with God. Are you thirsting for God's grace and forgiveness? Are you living outside a living relationship with God in Christ? Has the water in the jars been changed into the wine of the new age of Christ for you personally? Richard Bauckham says:

*Jesus gives life by connecting people with the divine springs of life from which the vitality of life is constantly sustained and replenished.*

If the season of Epiphany teaches us anything surely our place within the ongoing purposes of God. And these are:

- Jesus is the light of the world so those who believe in him will never walk in darkness
- the good shepherd who gives his life for the world
- the bread from heaven so that whoever connects with him by faith will never hunger or thirst again

- the resurrection and the life so that whoever believes in him though they die will live
- the way, the truth and the life
- the true vine so that we stay connected and produce the fruit of the Spirit

Here in our time today, I ask myself the question: how well is he revealed through our life together, our worship, our ministries, and our financial generosity? If we are the body of Christ, as Paul claims we are, then how well is the body functioning. Or as Anthony Robinson in his book, **Changing the Conversation**, asks, *what business are you in and how's business?* What epiphanies are we opening up for people as we live out our calling as Christ's body in the world? In this time God has given us what are we doing? And once again, what do we need to stop doing? How is Jesus as Lord being revealed to you and me as well as through you and me?

In 2018 did West Flamboro finds ways to bring epiphanies of grace and truth to folks who came into contact with us? I realize that many of you speak in hushed tones of folks who have left the fellowship for one reason or another. Instead of epiphanies, you say, we have experienced only dark shadows! Really! Yes, I agree, you have suffered losses. But are we, or are we not, the body of Christ?

It is still very early in a new year. What is "the hour" for you and this congregation? What call has come, what need has arisen, what unforeseen opportunities lie before us, that might lead to a re-arrangement in our plans and priorities so that the reign of God might break in? What surprises, like that of the wine steward, might await us? Do we really believe that God is for us here, that God still wants to use this congregation to be his lighthouse in this community? And if so, what is it that God is calling us to do here in West Flamboro.

John toward the end of his Gospel John says this about the signs:

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

***Amen***