

## Epiphany 2C 2016 Sermon

### *Isaiah 62:5*

*...as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.*

### *John 2:1-11*

*On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*

Most of what I share with you this morning comes from John Shea<sup>1</sup> and David Lose.<sup>2</sup>

The Wedding at Cana. It is a story that occurs in *none* of the other Gospels. Happening at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry in his Gospel, John tells us that this is the first sign Jesus performs in his ministry. Now, "'First' does not mean number one in a series of seven," remarks Fr. John Shea. "It means this sign displays a pattern that will be present in all the signs. It is 'first' in the sense of being archetypal. [The 'First fruits' of more to come, if you will.] The dynamics that are found in this story will be woven throughout the entire gospel..." (p. 24)

Now, it's important to our understanding to consider the *context* of today's story: a wedding. Fr. Shea notes that "On the **surface** level, a wedding is an event where two [persons] become one in order to create a third... [But on] the **depth** level, a wedding... [as our Old Testament lesson today and our own Prayer Book state – a wedding] symbolizes the relationship between the divine and the human, how the two embrace each other to create vitality. The wedding symbolizes how God and people are united in love to co-create spiritual life."

In today's Gospel, "The mother of Jesus is the spokesperson for the people side of this divine-human relationship," Fr. Shea continues. "She is [in this story] humanity aware of its lack, conscious that it cannot live to the fullest without continual communion with God. So she speaks to Jesus, the God side of the divine-human relationship [in this story], [she speaks to Jesus] the haunting and poignant words of all human insufficiency. 'They have no wine.' [In other words,] Humans have lost their union with God and, by implication, their communion with one another. Without this spiritual union the wedding of life cannot continue.

"These words of human need spoken by the mother of Jesus will be echoed by all [those in John's Gospel] who seek the presence of God as a remedy for human failing. [In Chapter 5 of John's Gospel] The royal official says, 'come down before my little boy dies' (John 4:48). [In Chapter 6] The lame man describes his helplessness as, 'I have no one to put me into the pool' (John 5:7). In the face of the overwhelming numbers of people, Philip realizes the scarcity of money and bread. 'Six months' wages would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little,' [Philip says in Chapter 6] (John 6:7). [In Chapter 9] Even though he has been healed, the blind beggar remembers, 'I was blind . . .' (John 9:25). [And in Chapter 11] Mary and Martha send a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill' (John 11:3). These statements combine to create a chorus of human afflictions... They are the cries of finitude—illness, lameness, blindness, hunger, and death. In short, the human condition is so jeopardized that people cannot celebrate. They have no wine.

"Jesus' glory is to bring divine abundance into the world of human lack... The very reason for Jesus' being," Fr. Shea states, "is to supply wine for the imperiled marriage of divine and human life..."

Professor David Lose emphasizes the fact that running out of wine at a Jewish wedding feast in Jesus' day was not simply a social *faux pas*; it was a disaster. "Wine isn't merely a social lubricant," he writes, "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. And *that's* a tragedy." What does Jesus do? He provides "...more wine than the whole crowd could have drunk not only during the three days of the wedding feast, but probably across three weeks... And... it's not just a cheap bottle of Chianti, but the best wine yet served.

"And that..." Dr. Lose concludes, "is what grace is like: an overflowing of joy, blessing, and the presence of God." Like John Shea, Dr. Lose points out the fact that this is Jesus' first miracle in John's Gospel. "[F]irst things matter," he writes. "Which is why it's significant that in [his] Gospel John describes the first thing that Jesus does as providing more wine, joy, and blessings than *this* couple – or any couple – could possibly have imagined or deserved.

"Because that's what grace looks like.

“Which seems like a timely message to share... I mean, look around – about the only things folks can talk about today is *scarcity*. [The bottom has fallen out of the Stock Market.] We don’t have enough money or food or security or power or privilege [or church members willing and able to host Coffee Hour, or help with funerals, serve on Altar Guild, help teach Sunday School]. Perhaps it’s like this normally, but *especially* during an election year it seems like candidates revel in telling us all the things that are wrong in order to win our vote by vowing to make it better.

“And the reason [this works] is simple: we’re disposed by evolution to pay attention to scarcity and fear. Think about it: if you miss an *opportunity*, it might be a bummer; but if you miss acknowledging a real **threat** – including running out of something essential – well, *that* might be deadly. And so we’re hard-wired to pay attention to scarcity and lack and fear. ...[E]veryone from marketers to politicians... focus their energy and creativity on creating in us a sense of lack in order to promise us they can fill it.

“[A scarcity mentality characterizes our *outward* lives and our *animal* nature. But] too often, I worry, we’ve defined the Gospel in the same, limited ways. To hear some theologians and preachers... Jesus lived, preached, taught, fed, cured, eventually was crucified, and was raised again by God, all in order that God will overlook our misdeeds. Don’t get me wrong, the forgiveness of sins is a central and important element of our faith. But too often we’ve spoken of it as the *only* element of faith, as if Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection were a kind of divine ‘white out’ for the check marks against us on St. Peter’s ledger.

“Which is why I’m grateful for John to remind us that grace isn’t only about making up for something we lack, but also providing more than we’d ever imagined or deserve. I mean, Jesus *could* have provided just enough wine for the party to go on, and, given that people have already been drinking a few days, even [one bottle of mediocre wine] would have been gratefully received. But he went way, way beyond expectations to provide more and better wine than they ever could have expected.

“Why? Because that’s what [the grace of God] looks like. After all, didn’t Jesus say (later in John’s Gospel), ‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.’? (John 10:10)

“[My friends, I wonder]... if... we couldn’t take an inventory of our congregation and of our individual lives and see how we might surprise those around us with an abundance of blessing. What is it, in other words, that you have a **ton** of and *other* people need? Is it smiles? Could [we go out this week] to smile at every person [we] see, whether familiar or not? In a world where suspicion is on the rise, that would be powerful. What about hugs or hospitality?” Could each of us invite one person to lunch or to coffee or to church just to be hospitable? What

about providing hospitality by signing up for coffee hour every once in a while, or making it a point to greet and introduce yourself to each visitor who enters these doors? Get to know the names of our children and youth, as well as some of our newer members, and get to know something about them? Some of you are already involved in ministries of blessing: you make baby blankets or caps, or prayer blankets – powerful signs to those who receive them of the abundance of God’s grace and love. You volunteer for organizations like CASA or El Hogar or the hospital or Loaves and Fishes or New Creations Inn (whose director told me last week how grateful he is for the volunteer efforts of one of our members). You work at the Festival Fair and the Thrift House, taking the opportunity to be gracious to customers while at the same time earning money to give to important and greatly-needed ministries. You send cards to those who are ill or grieving, or call them on the phone, and pray for them, showing them the abundance of God’s grace and love even in the midst of illness and hardship. You give generously to our Second Sunday Offering and our Lenten Projects, supporting many important ministries with your funds and prayers.

Last Sunday I spoke of the possibility of starting a “Laundry Love” ministry, an idea which received the endorsement of our SWEEPS Council last Sunday, and enthusiastic support from Dee Dee Clement from Loaves and Fishes, Sheilah Rollins of Mercy Today, and members of the Canon City Hunger Task Force, all of whom I have spoken with this past week. At our Annual Parish Meeting January 31<sup>st</sup>, you will hear more about Laundry Love, as well as a possible ministry of volunteering to provide transportation by driving a Loaves and Fishes van – with gas and insurance covered by Loaves and Fishes. We will set aside time at the Annual Meeting to discuss these matters and determine whether we as a parish family will support Laundry Love and/or a ministry of transportation – perhaps for a provisional period of three months or so, then re-evaluating. And these are but 2 ways we might share the love and grace of God with others.

I mentioned at the start that “The wedding [at Cana] symbolizes how God and people are united in love to co-create spiritual life.” That is the message and the calling of today’s Gospel: to recognize that God has filled our lives to the brim, and to allow ourselves to be transformed by God’s immeasurably abundant grace, that together with Christ we might fill some of the emptiness and lack so prevalent in our world, changing water into wine again and again.

AMEN

<sup>1</sup> John Shea, *The Relentless Widow*, Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006, pp. 20-26

<sup>2</sup> David Lose, “...in the Meantime, Dear Partner, Epiphany 3: What Grace Looks Like!” <http://www.davidlose.net/topics/preaching-2/dear-partner-in-preaching/>