**John 2:1-11** January 20, 2019

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Epiphany 2

*1On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, 2and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.” 4“Dear woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.” 5His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”*

*6Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. 7Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim. 8Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” They did so, 9and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside 10and said, “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.”*

*11This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

Why are you here today? What brought you out? Is it the people you know. You have friends here and you want to catch up with them?

Maybe you came out of habit. You’ve gotten used to the feeling of a padded seat and a wooden backed pew on Sunday morning. It may not be comfortable but it works for you.

Or maybe it’s the weather. While some cower before snowstorms, you love the challenge. To you, today’s snowstorm is a test to see what you are made of – and you came to see if others are made of the same stern stuff.

Those probably are not the main reasons you are here. I imagine that you are here today, first and foremost, for the same reason the disciples of Jesus found themselves in the dusty rural village of Cana with Jesus. Cana is where Jesus was. Better yet, they were invited to a wedding feast!

This wedding feast in Cana is not the sort of place we are used to finding Jesus. When we met Jesus in a sermon two weeks ago, he was a twelve-year-old with priorities rather different from most twelve-year-olds: *“[Mother,] Why were you looking for me? Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house[, the temple]?”* Three days straight, sitting in church? Really? And last week, then 30-year-old Jesus was at the Jordan River. He was not at a temple or synagogue, yet down by the river something profoundly religious happened. John the Baptist preached and Jesus was baptized and the clouds opened and a voice thundered from heaven and the Holy Spirit gently landed on him. All of this religiousness, this serious stuff—these are the sorts of places we expect to find Jesus.

At Cana, we don’t find anything resembling a church service or a Bible Class. Jesus comes for apparently no other reason than to be there. He wasn’t there for the church wedding because that’s not how they did weddings. He was there for the wedding feast; the fun, the laughs, the songs. Apparently Bible scholars just can’t bring themselves to believe that Jesus would be at a party. With one or two exceptions, almost none of the translations (not the NIV, not the KJV) can bring themselves to say that Jesus was at a wedding banquet, even though that is what the Greek word means. It doesn’t mean “marriage” with all its connotations of a pastor standing in the hushed almost silence of a church and a couple exchanging vows. The Greek word means “wedding feast.” Maybe Bible translators don’t get out enough.

Anyway, Jesus’ presence reminds us that healthy lives are a balance of the spiritual and the material. God loves it when we enjoy his earthly blessings. Jesus was there celebrating the marriage of these two youngsters. *And* Jesus was there enjoying blessings of food and drink. Jesus would soon prove that wine is a blessing from God in his miracle of creating wine. Yet elsewhere one of the Psalms sings: *“Praise the Lord, O my soul… He makes wine that gladdens the heart of man…”* (Psalm 104:1,15). Of course, Jesus’ presence at this wedding feast no more authorizes getting tipsy than his presence authorizes abuses of marriage. Jesus comes to celebrate God’s blessings, not to lend approval to their abuse. This vignette of Jesus at a marriage feast reminds us to live a balanced life, soul *and* body, for that is how God formed us!

While Jesus’ attendance at this wedding feast helps us appreciate God’s worldly blessings, the focus of this event is a religious truth. It is the message of Epiphany. Epiphany is this time of the church year when we remember how Jesus revealed himself to the world. If you want to tie a symbol to Epiphany, think of a lighthouse. At Cana Jesus flips the switch turning on the lighthouse lamp that shines miles into the darkness, that people would see and be guided by his light and be saved from ship-wrecking their souls.. And some do. The last verse of our reading says,

**“And His Disciples Believed on Him.” *[****KJV]*

They believed. They had faith. Now there are two basic parts to faith. There is the content of faith, and then there is the underlying feeling of faith, namely trust.

The difference between the content and the feeling of faith might be illustrated by a tightrope walker from a while ago. Back in the 1850s a certain acrobat made it his signature act to cross Niagara Falls on a tight rope 1,000 feet long and 160 feet over the waters. Part of his act was to stop half-way across this tightrope and do different things, like cook and eat a meal, or balance a chair or one leg on the wire and then proceed to stand on the chair. One day this performer asked the crowd if they believed he could carry a person across on his back. All agreed, he could. Then he started asking men to get on his back. No takers. They professed a certain faith in the tightrope walker, but they didn’t have the attitude, the confidence of faith. (P. Tan, *Encycl. of 7700 Illustrations*, §386)

In the disciples of Jesus, what was the content of their faith? Perhaps they knew Jesus as the Messiah, the promised one. But they certainly didn’t yet understand that he would die for their sins. At this point they surely could not have confessed the Apostles’ Creed. Jesus was the focus of their faith, but most of the details were still foggy. Which, for the moment, was ok. Because they were the one generation in history who stood on the divide between God’s promises of a Savior, and that Savior. So today we learn not so much from the content of their faith as from the attitude of their faith.

**A. Faith’s Attitude: Willing to Accept Correction**

The first place we see the attitude of faith is not in Jesus’ disciples, but in Mary. At this feast, Mary felt for the host family who were faced with the embarrassment of running out of wine. She went to Jesus. We are not told what Mary expected, whether a miracle or some act of leadership or what not. But Mary exemplifies faith. She takes the problem to Jesus.

This, however, is only the veneer of Mary’s faith. It is easy to ask. What happens next proves her faith. When she tried to prompt Jesus to act, he told her that she was trespassing on his territory. His ministry will be his ministry. And so he gently told her to let him do his work. Her fundamental mistake was speaking as his mother—whom he had obeyed for many years and would respect to his last—her mistake was thinking that her relationship gave her a voice in his ministry. (Edersheim, *Messiah*, 249) Jesus made it plain it would not be so.

Now Mary’s faith shines! Jesus corrects her but she doesn’t get disheartened. She doesn’t go off and mope. ***“His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’”*** This is faith. Faith that can accept a correction, even a rebuke, and still continue as faith. Blessed Mary!

How do you do? Do you know what I see so very, very often? God corrects people. God cares for them but sometimes must show tough love, and do you know what people do? They walk out. Instead of Mary going to the servants with unflagging confidence, so many walk out the door. “Fine! If that’s the way God is I don’t want any part of it.” Or they refuse to give up their dearly cherished beliefs or preferences, even when God says that it has no place in his kingdom.

And I feel it too! Yes, me too! I don’t like being told “No” or “You are wrong!” I hear those words, and do you know what I hear? I hear rejection, instead of concern and care for me. Dear God, give us a Mary-like faith strong enough to accept your correction, to see your love when you answer “No,” to continue in confident faith.

**B. Faith’s Attitude: Looking for a Higher Purpose**

The second thing this Word of God teaches about faith is in the last verse, ***“This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.”*** It says, ***“He thus revealed his glory.”*** So what is his glory? Is Jesus glory that he can give you 150 gallons of wine whenever he so chooses? Well, there are some people who would like a Savior like that! (Micah 2:11)

Jesus had some pretty harsh words for people who think like that. At another time, after he fed 5,000 people from one lunchbox, people came back to Jesus clamoring for more. He refused to provide them a crumb because they wanted full bellies, not God. (John 6)

Another time someone came to Jesus asking Jesus to settle an inheritance squabble. Jesus refused to take any part, and instead spoke the parable of the rich fool which ends, *“This very night your life will be demanded from you…”* (Lk 12)

The point is that Jesus performed many miracles with here and now things: bread, wine, fish. But Jesus always made it plain that these were just signs. Just signs, signs of something better.

The first time we went to Bernheim Forest, we followed the signs. We traveled up I-65 and at exit 112 saw the sign for the forest. At the end of the exit ramp another sign pointed to the right. And then a half mile or so down the road another sign pointed to the entrance. The signs got us where we were going. And we went in and fed the geese, toured the visitor center, climbed the fire tower. It was great! Now, would it not have been strange to drive up to exit 112, park the car at the end of the exit ramp beneath the Bernheim sign, gotten out and eaten a picnic lunch under the sign with all the traffic going by, and walked around the sign and taken pictures of the sign, turned around, gone home and told people we’d been to Bernheim?

It’s just a sign. It’s just a piece of Kentucky DOT aluminum with a reflective plastic coating. The sign points to something so much better if only you have enough sense in your head to follow the signs.

But people do that. They stop at the sign. They love the sign. They ask for the sign. They want the barley loaves, not the Bread of Life. They want the cash inheritance that moth and rust destroy, not the imperishable inheritance of God’s home. We want the world to stand up and notice us, rather than hear the words of commendation from our heavenly Father, *“Well done my good and faithful servant.”*

If you averaged out the last couple dozen prayers you have prayed, what have you been asking of God? Have you been asking for the bread, wine, the signs? Or have you, at least some of the time, been asking for the bigger and better gifts of God: trust in Jesus, purity of heart, humility, patience, contentment, desire for God’s truths, sorrow over sin? But we parade around the signs, asking God for raises and promotions, better health, more money, and forget about the real treasures, the treasures that Jesus’ sign at Cana was pointing to. Not Jesus the bread king, but Jesus King of Kings, Sin-Forgiver.

Watching Jesus and his followers at the rustic wedding feast, a sign points me to the most precious treasure I can ever possess in this world: Jesus. And I possess him through God-given faith. Faith that can bear God’s correction and still trust. Faith that realizes that all the good things God gives me in this world: the bread and wine, the people and the wealth, are just signs, just traces, of even better things that he gives me through faith.

When Jesus left Cana, do you know what his disciples did? They went with him, because by God’s grace they had the conviction of true faith. May that be the reason you come to this house of God every Sunday. Amen.