

## 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

### SERMON – *Knowing when the time is right.*

Sun 16/01/2022

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Readings: Isa. 62:1-5; Ps. 36:5-10; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; Jn. 2:1-11

### The Wedding at Cana

2 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup> Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup> When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." <sup>6</sup> Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. <sup>9</sup> 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 <sup>10</sup> 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." <sup>11</sup> Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

### SERMON

I was drawn to two themes as I pondered today's readings. The first being this idea of connection and its meaning, the second self-trust.

We are all intimately connected as one body in Jesus. Isaiah celebrates this intimate union with our creator, describing us as the joyful bride of God. Though there had been alienation and rejection from both sides in the past, the prophet describes us as God's delight. That connection is also emphasized in Paul's oddly graphic description of the members of the church as body parts — that is to say, we need each other because we are not a living, breathing body if we are somehow separated.

This connection is seen through John's Gospel in the communal context in the joy shared at a wedding feast. The celebration does not stop when the wine runs out, but continues seamlessly because Jesus as divine may demonstrate his power but as the human Jesus also recognizes his own connection and obligation to family, especially his mother, and community, symbolized in this wedding.

Every culture has different wedding customs and some of those are attached to the betrothal and engagement. In today's passage from Isaiah, the prophet seems to have been addressing a people who had returned from exile in Babylon to the land promised by God.

They are rebuilding and assuming a new identity. They no longer have a king, but they do have a temple and the celebration of Festivals that recall significant moments in their past history help that history come to life. Their story, one of rejection and abandonment, is now one of intimacy and commitment with God.

While many worry that they somehow fall short in appearance and worthiness, joyful wedding imagery permeates this passage, and we are called to see ourselves in a new light. We are renamed as "My Delight Is In Her, our land on which we stand "Married". The one who loves us is referred to as the Builder. This is the way we ought to see ourselves. Rather than measuring our deficiencies we see

ourselves in the eyes of our lover, who is our creator. And all of this is the lover's idea. It is the lover's purpose. It is the lover's delight.

We are all unique in our thoughts and feelings, self-awareness, likes and dislikes, shape, size, colour the list goes on, yet we are the same body. This is the message being highlighted in Paul's letter to the Corinthians.

Corinth as a city located in Greece was culturally, racially, ethnically, and economically diverse. It was a commercial hub trading in the logistical movement of goods across a spit of land around fifty kilometres wide which allowed merchants a safer path than that of sailing. Its no surprise wealth attracts all people regardless of race, culture or creed. The Corinthian church no doubt reflected this diversity.

The temptation is to see differences creating boundaries. People have different talents, attributes, and preferences. The community, as indicated, would have included people of several nationalities. There would have been slaves, military veterans, merchants, those who had formerly worshiped their gods by sacrificing at a temple, others who had belonged to one of the mystery religions, or any number of other faiths that filled the empire. For all, their gifts were baptized with them, and could now be used for the body of Christ.

Paul insists that this diversity is not a problem. It's not something we must ignore, or transcend, or overcome. In fact, these differences are essential to the body of Christ, just as in our own bodies our heart is essential to move blood or lungs to exchange gasses our kidneys to filter and remove waste. Each organ is unique, yet each is an essential part of the body. This is the will of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has brought us together and our individual gifts make us the body of Christ. The person who has one gift does not have a different Spirit than the person who has another. Rather the diversity which we think threatens our unity is what unifies us into one body.

Remember just as each of us in our communities today do, Paul lived and worked among the Corinthians. They got to see how his gifts, both spiritual and economic (he practiced tent making and repair with his friends Priscilla and Aquila), fit together with theirs. This is the will of the Spirit, just as in Isaiah where the betrothal and renaming are the will of the love.

Even though it's not clear that Jesus would have chosen the wedding feast at Cana for his first public sign, Jesus turns the water not into rotgut, but into wine so memorably wonderful that the chief steward is shocked. Abundance and goodness. Is this what we bring to the church? Is this what we provide to food banks and clothing banks and gift giveaways? We are telling those outside the church what we think of them and our good news according to the quality of our giving.

On occasions such as Christmas the food ministry calls for donations and while high-end luxury items are not necessarily called for, there were some requests for nice things to make the season bright for patron.

I have heard the remark "so these were the kinds of things poor people were demanding. "These things are not demanded they are what we're happy to give," I replied. How do we feel inside when we are called upon to give, not just our spare change or time but to give from the resources we have identified as necessary for our own comfort or wellbeing? Our giving is a sign, just as the act of turning water into wine was a sign pointing to Jesus.

In her commentary on John, Karoline M. Lewis makes an interesting point. Each of the four evangelists describes a different first action in the public ministry of Jesus. For Matthew it's the famous Sermon on the Mount. An exorcism of a demon is the first official act of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. Luke describes the visit of Jesus to his hometown, and how preaching the Jubilee in the synagogue of Nazareth enrages the folks and nearly gets Jesus killed.

In John the first official act is the miracle at the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee. One of the most common and joyful community rituals, such a celebration, certainly in the cultural context of Jesus, could not only be derailed but result in unrecoverable humiliation for all involved. But thanks to his mother, who despite discouraging words from her son, who sets the events in motion, Jesus performs a great sign of wonder, bringing happiness while symbolizing the abundance and abundant life he has come to bring to all.

Mary really puts Jesus on the spot. They have no wine, she tells them. His response is stark. Literally he says “Woman, what to me and you?” Raymond Brown, who wrote a massive commentary on John, points to examples in the Old Testament to suggest this question could be taken one of two ways. Jesus could be saying that she is bothering him, and that he is an injured party. Or Jesus might simply be saying this is not his problem, why bother him with it.

In the face of disaster, despite an apparent lack of interest, Jesus acts. And this leads to my second theme. Self-trust.

Why did Jesus respond to his mother the way he did? We will never be certain; however he did act. I have pondered the idea that this was one example of the human Jesus growing into self-awareness and importantly self-belief as the One chosen by God. Maybe it took the faith of Mary who knows Jesus only as a mother can to ‘nudge’ her son, to reassure the young man that he is ready for the life to which God has called him. I can think of times in my own life when my mother did much the same thing, how without it I would have missed an opportunity to reach my own potential.

This impending disaster allows room for Jesus to begin his public ministry. In this account of Jesus at the wedding I see not only the divine but also the humanity of Jesus, a reality that provides a reassurance that you and I being human can follow in our frailty his example.

We’re all connected. We are one body.