

Second Sunday After Epiphany

Wicker Park Lutheran Church

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“A note from the preacher: It is my practice to write sermons for the ‘ear and not the eye’ and my conviction that sermons are best *experienced*. So I recommend listening to the audio as well as reading the manuscript if possible. But however you experience the sermon I pray you are refreshed by God’s plentiful promises! Peace, Troy Medlin”

I like to think about this as Jesus trying to make a first impression, after all this is Jesus’s first Sign.

As we begin to wander along the way wistfully walking through these weeks that we call the Sundays after epiphany we meander our way through the myriad of ways that Jesus continues to manifest into our midst.

Again and again we are struck by the the strange, subversive, and surprising scenes that spotlight how God is showing up in space and time.

And, we have stumbled upon what is said to be Jesus First Sign.

Everyone say, “First Sign.”

This first sign would be swirling with significance, because it would set the scene for the rest of the story that John is showcasing about Jesus.

NOW...this beloved one of God..this Divine being...who has come in the flesh.....has called his first disciples to follow him.....And...by way of inaugurating his time among the people.....

Jesus performs his first sign.....

So to perform his first sign.....

....to begin his public ministry.....with a splash.... Or maybe a pop ((of a cork....))

And: really show who he is and what he is all about, to the whole world....

Jesus of course: the Holy one of Israel and the God of all creation

Help me a preach a little bit :) Shows up at a _____! A Wedding....

Jesus chooses to perform his first sign there.....Jesus wants to set the tone for the rest of his time of teaching and testifying by spending his time at a wedding....

AND, this wedding is taking place in cana of galilee. Now, Cana during the time of our text was a small town that had a population of about 200 people. So, here we are at a small town wedding with Jesus his disciples and even his mom (and weddings in first century judaism)would not last only into the night: if the music and merriment and merlot were good,but could actually last up to seven days. So, by the time we drop into the wedding in our text,you better believe the party was already pretty lit: Amen? I imagine the party was filled with roukas revilarly for quite awhile already probably even days: you might even say the wine had been flowing.

But then: something completely unexpected and for a wedding: unacceptable happened...The wine ran out.

So...then naturally Jesus's mom says, "Jesus...man.....they ran out of wine...." You can do something about this....right?

Jesus and his mom have a quick and somewhat confusing back and forth. And then, Jesus mom maybe sensing what Jesus could do tells the servants at the wedding to do whatever he tells them to do almost with a wink and a nod.

Then it gets interesting....

Jesus sees 6, 20 to 30 gallon water jars used for ritual purification 130 gallons in all...(that's a lot of gallons.)

Tells the servants to fill them to the brim and then draw some out and take it to the chief steward.

He is so shocked when he tastes what had been drawn he calls the bridegroom over and says, *"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."*

So wedding celebration has been going on for days not hours, already pretty liquified, parties already been rolling, and the wine had already been flowing, Wine ran out and so Jesus says "not only can I get you some more...I'm going to take this water and then those purification jars and make 180 more gallons (a lot of wine btw...). Of wine for this small town wedding and keep this thing party on."

Not only is there now more wine, there is so much more wine: enough for them to keep this celebration well stocked for days, and then some.

Can anyone say, “CHEERS?”

Quite the first impression...I'd say.

And, the text says, this was Jesus's first SIGN. This first sign would be swirling with significance because it would set the scene for the rest of the story that John is showcasing about Jesus.

So: with a scandalously over the top, kind of ridiculous, extravagant, extremely abundant some might even say, wasteful amount of wine given in the middle of a party that was already rockin, at a small town wedding in Cana the word of God incarnate has begun his ministry among us...and God's glory was revealed.

Jesus choose to perform this sign....first.

Before those masterful and magnificent miracles manifested Jesus's divine majesty and might,

before showing us anything else about who this God is he came to make known.

Jesus chose to reveal his glory this way.....at the beginning of his mission among the multitudes by performing what seems like a lavish, could be ridiculous display of excessiveness. Gallons of water filled to the brim turned to the best wine given for guests who already had plenty, with jugs left over. It seems more than a little bit surprising if not Frivolous, or irresponsible for Jesus first sign.

But...I wonder, If this being .God incarnate, Jesus's first sign if it is actually meant to signify and point us toward God's first word to us

First Sign.....First Word

The word that God wants us to hear and that is true....before everything else and the thing at the bottom and the foundation of who God is and how God relates with God's people. If the way Jesus so freely and without limit or regard gives more wine than they knew what to do with at a wedding before he did anything else is an image, a portrait meant to proclaim to all people.

The way that God so freely and without merit or limit or regard gives to us:

Grace

Mercy

Presence

forgiveness

and unconditional love

more of God's very self than we could ever imagine:

and this God calls each and every one of us God's very own beloved and this graciousness of God is lavish

Ridiculous

Excessive

and can even seem frivolous or irresponsible

because this grace is dolled out in such heaping, up to the brim amounts to all of us and all of them and all the wrong people and it is done *first*, before we can prove ourselves

before we have done anything

or said anything, before our works of love and acts of justice, before we earn it or deserve it. And is given to all of us without reservation: throwing caution to the wind. God's first word to us is a word of promise and mercy and life out of death running over, more than enough....like that first sign. And water turned into wine for you and me...for all of us. Because that is what God does.

But... I know it can be easy to say all of this, but it can be really hard to believe it is true: the voices that are often loudest and most persistent both inside our own hearts and in our world seem to be shouting the opposite. Most of the time it is more like we live in a world where the wine has run out a long time ago...and the parties been over and the lights have been turned out and we've all gone home. Where pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps is the air we breathe *and the wine has run out.*

Where earning love and purchasing forgiveness through proper penance makes much more sense *and the wine has run out.* Where we are trying to chase our own worth, belovedness and identity, up the endless ladder of security and success *and the wine has run out.*

Where grace and love seems to have been traded in for try harder and earn your keep *and the wine has run out.* Where injustice seems to always get the last word and liberation sounds like an empty platitude *and the wine has run out.* Where shame and fear have come to reside in our hearts *and the wine has run out* Or loss and grief and pain are the homes we live in *and it seems as though the wine has run out.*

the party's over, and the lights have gone out.

How many of you know what I'm saying?

But

it may be: just as it was in Cana that when it seems that our glass has been emptied to the last drop.... wine has run out...parties over... is when God miraculously provides grace upon grace running over. In surprising ways: that we would least expect. *And water is turned into wine.*

Like an unexpected word of forgiveness and grace that seems to come out of nowhere *And water is turned into wine.* Like reconciliation in a relationship that seemed unrepairable and *water is turned into wine.* Or finding community when loneliness seemed your only friend *And water is turned into wine.* Or an embrace and a word of comfort in the midst of sorrow, like people who advocate justice within broken systems and proclaim a different vision where all live with overflowing, plentiful pours of dignity and value, *and water is turned into wine.* Or when we experience acceptance when all we had known was rejection *and water is turned into wine.* Or when we are the recipient of some kind of surprising generosity of spirit from someone and we taste a sip of the generous heart of God and *water is turned into wine.* When in a glimmer and flash even: for a moment we feel the truth that God loves us, individually and that every part of who you are is held in God's embrace. And let that go deep in our bones, *And water is turned into wine.*

And when we gather again and again as a community around this God's words of life to hear this shocking and upside down, lavish, excessive, filled to the brim, running over promise of mercy, forgiveness and death and resurrection and it washes over us. *And water is turned into wine,* in this place.

This first word is Just like another first sign:

the first sign that we receive as children of God, before we have done anything. We are washed in the waters and are drenched in God's mercy, receive all of God's promises, are named as God's beloved, sealed with the Holy Spirit and marked with the cross of Christ forever. And, miraculously in this little font *water is turned to wine* for our own flesh and blood.

And it happens week after week where some crumbs of bread and cups of wine become a feast of life for you and I and for the whole cosmos, and we take this lavish,

excessive and over the top, running over word of grace upon grace into our very bodies and *water is turned into wine* at this table for you.

These subversive and surprising...sips of water turned to wine then serve as sustaining signs for us of the day when at last we feast at another table set for all creation and find ourselves at another wedding. When you and I and all of this weary world take our seats at the wedding feast of the Lamb and never thirst again and the wine will never ever run out.

So, until then let us be on the lookout for those signs in each other, this place and in places and people we would least expect. Where we taste on the tip of our tongue that first word of love and grace and mercy....

By the gallons. *And Water is turned into wine.* Quite the first impression quite the first sign

And water is turned into wine.