

Pastor T.C. Arnold
2nd Sunday after Epiphany
John 2:1-11
January 17th, 2010

This season of Epiphany begins with Magi from the east making their way with gifts to worship the newborn King. Epiphany shows us how this King is not just for the Jews – He’s for the Gentiles – all people. Then, we kick off the public ministry of Jesus the very next Sunday with His Baptism. We celebrated the Baptism of our Lord last Sunday. And then there is the situation before us in the Gospel – John chapter two.

But before this miracle, this “beginning sign” that Jesus performed, our Savior was placed in a precarious situation. The Bible says that Jesus was driven out in the wilderness by the Spirit and endured temptation from Satan while fasting for forty days. You remember the conversations: *“If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”* Jesus would respond that man does not live by bread alone. Satan said, *“If you are the Son of God throw yourself down and the angels will carry you up before your foot strikes a stone.”* Jesus said, *“You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”* Satan would say, *“I will give you all that you see if you fall down and worship me.”* As if Satan had something that didn’t already belong to the Lord, Jesus would answer, *“You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.”*

All in all this temptation was easy. You see, this temptation would prefigure the true test when Jesus would be tempted to take the easy way out in the garden of Gethsemane or standing before Pilate, or to dodge the suffering and agony of the cross. But, like in the desert, He would not avoid this temptation either. He would bear it and endure it because to do this would mean so much more for you – and it is you that he loves most of all.

Such is the reason for the situation before us in Cana today. There was much before our Jesus that was far greater than turning water into wine. But there was a purpose to it and this wedding feast was meaningful to those who were in attendance and to you and me today. How things begin with Jesus is very important. His ministry and our life today are no exceptions.

You see, after Jesus was baptized – which ushered in His public ministry – after Jesus spent time in the desert – showing us that there will be more temptation to come for the Savior of the world – our Lord would make an important beginning by calling simple men to do a simple yet, at the same time, a very difficult job. He would call fishermen to be fishers of men. Simple men that Jesus would encounter while walking along the sea shore. These were men to whom He would call out and they would actually follow. This is how all of what we hear about would begin.

The beginning of a ministry – the beginning of temptation in the desert – the beginning of simple men being called for a simple yet difficult task – and the simplicity of a miracle which would begin a ministry that would carry forth to the greatest of all miracles on a cross. I draw attention to all this “beginning” stuff because the beginning that is made in today’s reading is very important. It’s no accident that this beginning involves a wedding and wine. It’s no accident, beloved in the Lord, that these words are used in the Gospel account: *“When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know*

where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew)...” That’s the important part that most people wouldn’t see as important. Did you hear who the first to actually know were? Was it the master? Was it the most prominent guests? No! The first to know of this “beginning” sign – the first miracle – were the servants of all people. There’s no mistake about that.

And for that reason our Lord calls us not be the most prominent in His Kingdom. He doesn’t call us to be the master of the wedding feast. The Lord calls you to be the servant. The servant has the lowest seat. The servant has the hardest job. The servant takes on the form of Christ in the midst of those he is serving. The servant is what you are called to be – no matter what your status at work or at home or in this great country of ours. You are “Christ’s” servant and that entails more than just sitting around and listening to people like me. That entails work and many times its hard work. That entails service to neighbor – sometimes whether you like them or not. Servant work is not glamorous but it is your work.

But there is an upside to this “being a servant” for Jesus and it’s the best part of all. The servant is the first to know. Remember, it was the servant who knew where the wine came from at the wedding feast. It was the sinful woman who was acting in the role of servant when she would wash the feet of the Savior and dry them with her hair. It was our Savior Himself who would show His disciples the same type of behavior by washing their feet – even though they couldn’t believe it or even understand it.

You see, our Lord knows that when we step out of the role of servant we step into a role of personal entitlement. In other words, someone else is supposed to take on those “servant” roles even for my sake. We are blessed to have everything for our life everlasting done for us by our Jesus. That’s a promise we can hold fast to for the rest of our life. But God needs the tools and the instruments that He created (you) to tell the world about what He has done for them. Shame on us if we stand idle and say nothing while the world dies. We have opportunities with our neighbor close by or in far away places (like those in Haiti – suffering from the earthquake this past week). Horrible situations can make for blessed opportunities. Be the servant – to your neighbor – to those who are in desperate need. Stop waiting for someone else to do it – or someone else to wait on you. That’s not the vocation Christ has given to you.

Those who knew, that is, those at the beginning of this miracle were the servants. And that is no accident. The servants knew – and I want you to know – there is much more than just wine for you in this “beginning miracle” in the text.

You see, wine is more than just drink offered at a festive occasion. Wine had its roots way back in the history of the people. Wine was understood as a drink given in spiritual and physical joy. When Isaac blessed his son Jacob he said, “*May God give you the dew of heaven...and plenty of grain and wine.*” Wine was a sign of a future hope. The prophet Isaiah would say that the Lord will make for all the peoples a “*rich food, a feast of well-aged wine*” in the promise of life eternal to come. Wine was a sign of abundance when Joel among other prophets would refer to the wine “*overflowing*” in the Lord (Joel 2:24). You see, there is something to this wine. It prefigures something far greater for you in joy, future hope and abundance.

And that joy, hope and abundance at the beginning sign in Cana would see its end – which is still a beginning for you. This sign in Cana would show us the sign of joy that

looked like a blood soaked cross and the agony of our Savior. This sign would prefigure a future hope all of us have in a world that doesn't seem to have much of a future. And then there is the abundance. If anything what we have is an abundance. Today is your beginning of abundance of faith - each day that begins new for us - just like for Tealynn in the waters of Holy Baptism, there is a new beginning of abundance. There is enough of our Savior's blood for everyone (an abundance) - the greatest most disgusting sinner among us - you and me. The abundance of God's grace saves you. That's yours and that's life.

The season of Epiphany shows forth a Savior who makes things happen for you - for you to do - for your life that is in Him only. May God richly bless and keep you in that abundant/beginning life. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.