

Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church (Columbus, OH)
 Second Sunday After Epiphany – January 16, 2022
 John 2:1-11 – God Sanctifies Marriage
 By Rolf Preus, preached by Vicar Wagner

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen. Hear again from the Gospel reading for the Second Sunday after Epiphany, from John chapter 2, **“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), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, ‘Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.’ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”** This is our text.

Jesus first showed his glory as true God at a wedding. In the prologue of his Gospel, John writes, **“We beheld his glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”** And here in the very next chapter John writes, **“This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.”**

Glory belongs to God alone. *Soli Deo gloria* was a foundational theme of the Reformation, **“to God alone be the glory.”** If the glory belongs to Christ, then Christ must be God. So the miracle at Cana shows that Jesus Christ is almighty God.

The master of the feast said, **“You have kept the good wine until now!”** These sound like the glorious words describing the work of almighty God in creation, **“Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good.”** Jesus didn’t make cheap wine. He made the best. Behold, it was very good.

Jesus performed His first miracle at a wedding. In our assumed flesh and blood, He did what only God can do. God sanctified all marriage by his presence at Cana. He blessed the flesh and blood union of marriage at a wedding, by changing water into wine.

Marriages are not made in heaven. In heaven there is no marriage. Marriage is made here on earth. In the beginning, God made them male and female. He formed the man out of the dust of the ground and He made the woman out of the man’s rib. He brought the woman to the man and married them to each other. Adam and Eve did not evolve. God created them in His own image. Marriage didn’t evolve either. God established marriage in creation. When Jesus spoke of the permanence of marriage in Matthew 19, He appealed to what God did in the beginning when He joined Adam to Eve, **“Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.”** Marriage is God’s doing.

So an attack on marriage is an attack on God. When men and women, unable to govern their sexual urges, engage in sexual intimacy outside of marriage, they sin against God. It doesn’t matter if you are in love. It doesn’t matter if you think you are in a committed relationship. What matters is if you are married. If you are not, and you engage in sexual relations, you commit fornication. And fornication is an attack on marriage.

Adultery is also an attack on marriage. We read in Proverbs 5:15-20, **“Drink water from your own cistern, and running water from your own well. Should your fountains be dispersed abroad, streams of water in the streets? Let them be only your own, and not for strangers with you. Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love. For why should you, my son, be enraptured by an immoral woman, and be embraced in the arms of a seductress?”**

Adultery is not only a sin against the defrauded husband or wife. It’s a sin against God who joined this man to this woman. Adultery destroys marriage. The same God who said in Malachi 2:16 that He hates divorce, makes adultery grounds for divorce in Matthew 19:9.

God established marriage in the beginning as the lifelong union of one man with one woman. He blessed that union. And He continues to bless it with children, according to His Fatherly creative Will. The union of a man with a man or a woman with a woman is not, and cannot be, a marriage for the simple reason that God has not ordained it, and explicitly forbids it in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Same sex “marriage” is an oxymoron: a contradiction in terms. Such unions cannot bring forth life. They can only bring forth death.

How do we know that marriage is an institution of God, blessed by God, and sanctified by God? The Bible says so. Jesus sanctified marriage – He made it holy – by choosing a wedding to be the time and place when He

first manifested His glory as almighty God. He changed water into wine to signify his love for marriage.

You've seen marriages fail. You've seen husbands and wives at each other's throats. Husbands cheat on their wives. Wives cheat on their husbands. They drag marriage through the mud. Drunkenness, drug use, violence, irresponsible spending, and the constant pick-pick-picking away of unabated criticism – it drives the spouse into the ground. We see all this and think, “That marriage is in bad shape.” No wonder people decide to forgo marriage and just move in together, pretending that fornication isn't fornication and if it is, God doesn't mind, or if He does, He'll forgive anyway because, after all, God is love.

What folly! As if God can be mocked! No, instead of treating what is abused and distorted and trashed as if it is used-up junk, look to Him who takes what is abused and renders it whole, who takes what is distorted and refashions it according to God's own design, and who takes what is trashed and makes it beautiful once again. Marriage is a wonderful estate! Christ comes into marriage and makes it wonderful.

As we heard in the epistle lesson, in Ephesians 5, Christ is the bridegroom who gave His life for His Bride, the Church. He became her head by becoming her Savior, by bearing in His own body all her sins and by washing away those sins and filling her with His Spirit in the washing of Holy Baptism. Christ sanctifies His Bride and makes her holy.

The Church, on her part, submits to Christ as to her Savior. She is not afraid of him abusing her and disdaining her if she fails to please him. She knows she pleases him. He tells her so. Christ rejoices in His Church and loves her. He purchased her with His own blood, washed her clean of all her sins, and claimed her as His beautiful Bride.

“My hour has not yet come,” Jesus said to his mother. Although His hour did come for the miracle at Cana, His hour had not yet come to fully manifest his glory on the cross. Three years beyond that wedding, facing imminent crucifixion on the cross, Jesus said in John 12, **“The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified ... Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save Me from this hour’? But for this purpose I came to this hour. Father, glorify Your name.”**¹

Then God glorified the name of Jesus. It was on the cross. There He bore the sin of unfaithful husbands and wives, of wife-beaters, drunks, fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, and every kind of sinner who has violated the holy institution of marriage. By bearing those sins He took them away. And now this same Jesus comes into our marriages to sanctify them.

There were six stone waterpots, which were used for ritual purification. Six is the number of imperfection. It's one short of seven. Seven signifies God's blessing on the world. Six cannot sanctify, six signifies a purity it cannot give. But the signs of Christ seal what they signify. Whatever Jesus touches is sanctified by His holy and vicarious obedience, His suffering and death. Jesus fulfills and replaces the Old Testament rituals with his Gospel. He does not sanctify us by means of legal regulations, but by His grace, by bearing our sin and forgiving us.

Jesus' mother, Mary, symbolizes the Church. Mary said to the servants, **“Whatever He says to you, do it.”** In the same way the Church says to her pastors, **“Whatever Jesus says to you, do it.”** The Church's agenda is whatever Jesus says. Just as the husband and the wife are one flesh, so Christ binds himself to His Bride, the Holy Christian Church, and permits nothing to come between them. Jesus is Lord of the Church. Mary, who bore the Son of God, submits to the authority of Him she bore. So also does the Church.

Jesus first showed His glory as God at a wedding. He told the whole world what God thinks of marriage. God doesn't change His mind. He doesn't get tired of putting up with us and decide to scrap the whole thing. He stays with it. He stays with marriage. He stays with us. When we look around us and see how a dying and increasingly godless culture discards, with contempt, what God sanctifies as precious, we remember who we are and to whom we belong. We are the Bride of Christ. We are washed clean of all our sin by His blood. We are joined, by Holy Baptism, to him who will never be unfaithful to us, who will never divorce us for someone prettier or more appealing, but will hold us safe in His keeping. He is faithful. He cannot deny himself.

And since Christ holds onto His Bride, we, both husbands and wives, hold onto each other, freely forgiving one another as we have been freely forgiven. Husbands imitate Christ's faithful love for His Church. Wives imitate the Church's faithful submission to Christ. And whatever is lacking in our imitation is never lacking in God's grace. God sanctifies marriage. He stays with this holy institution and sustains it until the end of time. Amen.

¹ John 12:23, 27