Text: John 2:1-11

**Introduction**

Do you have anything in you life that you find beautiful…strikes your fancy…but you have absolutely no idea why? It just does?

The Wedding at Cana. Classic Epiphany text. But for some reason it only shows up in our lectionary once every three years. Is something like that for me. Every three years that we roll around to year C I think to myself, “good, I’ll get to preach on the Wedding at Cana.” It’s a beautiful story. But then I refresh memory of what various commentators and theologians have said and written. What a few preachers have preached. Crack open the in case of emergency practical texts. And at the end of preparation find myself staring at a blank page.

Cana still being beautiful, but complete at a loss as to how to preach it.

Most people seem to jump from the fact that it is wedding to preaching about marriage. Which there are worse things to do, but honestly the text just isn’t about marriage. It might be about weddings. Maybe a bit more on that. There might be something in passing that can be saif about marriage itself. But that’s not the beauty of this story.

Roman Catholics and Feminists, usually not on the same team, both want to preach about Mary. The first about how Mary is a good intercessor. If you have a problem say the Rosary, ask Mary for help, and she might do exactly what she did at Cana. You might think that the Feminist theologians would be happy about someone pointing at a woman as the main character. It passes the Bechdel test. But you’d be wrong. The concentrate on the “problematic exchange” between Mary and Jesus. Now to our post-feminist ears “woman” might sound problematic, but nobody prior to 1960 took it as harsh and the best Greek scholars emphatically add, “it is by no means disrespectful, but there is generally no English equivalent, so it is usually best to omit the word in translation.” Why don’t our translators follow that advice? The New Living Translation – one that attempts to capture the meaning if not the exact words – does. It has Jesus say, “dear woman.” I know what they are trying, but I have a feeling that might still be problematic. The ESV we read in worship is attempting word for word, so it isn’t going to skip anything.

Maybe the problem is simply that I find The Wedding at Cana beautiful. And trying to preach, or even worse explain, beauty is a fruitless endeavor. You either see it, or you don’t. It is in the eye of the beholder.

**Text**

But one thing the text does say is that “this was the first of his signs.” The miracles in John are always signs. In Matthew, Mark and Luke they are first simply works of power. And from the power you are meant to know who the one doing them is – the messiah. But they are signs in John. And signs are not just about who He is, but a revelation of the heart and purpose of the one doing them. Jesus does works of power so we might know that he is God. But these works are also supposed to tell us about the kind of God we have.

**Weddings**

So the first, most basic thing I think Cana would reveals to us about God is his view of marriage and weddings. And it really hasn’t changed from Genesis. When God made man it didn’t take him long before he said, “It is not good for the man to be alone.” After which he made the woman and instituted marriage. This all happened, as the wedding liturgy reminds us, “in paradise, before humanity’s fall into sin.” Now sin certainly scrambles up the gifts of God. And there have been an almost unlimited number of folks across time that decided marriage was one of those things, and it would just be better to do without. From the Jewish Essenes to various hermits and monastics to the Shakers of America. But Jesus is invited to the wedding. Jesus is usually the one who does the inviting. But here he is invited. And he honors the occasion with his presence. Beyond that He says to his mother, “My hour has not yet come.” Yet he hastens that hour to right then. Just as the first of his works after creation was to institute marriage. The first of his signs is to bless a marriage.

Marriage to God in the new covenant remains what it has always been. A blessed estate. One that he encourages and make fruitful. And also an estate designed to promote faith and train us in love. There are innumerable trials, crosses and adversity within marriage. There are the sorrows of parting. There are the joys of unity. It is an earthly estate that gives us a glimpse into the ways of God.

Now also one quick observation about weddings. And maybe we could expand that to celebrations or good things in general. It is common, especially within the church to tut-tut the expense of many good things. To worry about being frivolous with what God has provided. And I’m not going to say that there aren’t cases of excessive or wasteful expense. But hold that in the balance with the amount of wine Jesus creates. To the brim as he tells them to fill the jars is 30 gallons each. So Jesus supplies this one wedding with about 180 gallons of good wine. When the flute is played, it is time to dance. The beauty is in recognizing the time.

**Christology**

Now I want to tease out a couple of things we might learn about Christ our Lord himself.

The first is a thought that returns in comparison with the 12 year old Jesus of a couple of weeks ago. That 12 years old felt it was time to be in his Father’s house. He felt like it was his time. Yet he submitted to his earthly Father and Mother. And he grew in grace and favor. Yet now we will stick with the tradition 30 year old Jesus seems more reluctant. “My hour has not yet come.” Yet it clearly had. And his submission was no longer to his Mother. Mary at no time tells Jesus what to do. In fact, contrary to what Rome wants to say, Mary doesn’t even ask Jesus for anything. She just makes him aware. “They have no wine.” Being fully human – according to his humanity – the word comes from outside of us. Mary’s statement to Jesus can be the Spirit of the Father’s words. “They – meaning humanity – has no wine.” Are you Jesus going to submitted to your Heavenly Father? Now is the hour to begin. And Jesus supplies the wine for the wedding feast. Something he continues to do to this day.

But the second thing I think we can learn is given to us by how Mary does talk with Jesus. She doesn’t say “make this” or “give me that.” She simply states to Jesus what is lacking. And then she tells the rest of the servants to “do whatever he tells you.” Mary had faith that if she merely pointed out what was lacking that God himself would provide what was needed. In fact that God would provide more than she could even ask for. You could imagine Mary asking, “son, can you fill up one of these jars with what was in there.” And Jesus might have surely provided. But knowing the lack he doesn’t skimp buy. Jesus provides “the good wine.” Jesus provides 180 gallons of good wine. We have a God to whom we should present out lack, and expect him to provide. Have faith that he will provide more than we could ever ask for ourselves.

**Moral**

And this for me might be the core of the beauty of Cana. Almost to much to look at. Because that God of abundance is true. Oh , what peace we often forfeit, oh what needless pain we bear. I upbraid myself – “oh you a little faith.” Do you expect God to give you a snake? A scorpion? Is your image of God so cramped and small that you think he will turn you away? And the answer of course is yes. “Lord, help my unbelief.” Help me to be more like Mary – “Do what he says.” Help me to be more like the wedding servants who surely thought filling six heavy stone jars with ridiculous amounts of water was crazy. But they did it. And they took what for all they knew was just water – until they had taken it out – to the master of the feast. And then their hearts were glad they had done what he said. Help me to live in that kind of trust in your loving kindness. To not turn away from that beauty fearing my ugliness.

**Eschatological**

One last thing I thing which I think this sign reveals. Our ways are that we put our best feet forward. Everyone serves the good wine first. And we do this because we hope that by the time they might see our ugliness they are already too drunk. The beer goggles approach to life. Part of the reason I think decline and fall stories are so immediately real. We’ve seen the good and so we expect the bad to be coming later. But this is not the way of God. God leads with the law and the cross. We might recognize the ugliness of our sin. But with God, “he saves the good wine for the last.”

When we find ourselves at the foot of the cross. When we find ourselves with the dregs of the wine. That is when Christ says “today you will be with me in paradise.” That is when we behold the beauty of salvation. First the cross then the glory. “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed him.”

The good wine has been prepared for you. This is but a foretaste. The Wedding feast has no end.