

Grace and peace are yours in abundance in your knowledge of God and your Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

God's Word comes to us today in John 2: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."

I'm sure you would agree that "firsts" are important. It's your first date with that special someone; you want everything to go just right. It's your first day at school; will my friends still be there? It's your first sermon at your new church. Will you know when to stop talking? Like the old commercial said, "You never get a second chance to make a first impression."

So today we see something pretty significant happening in the second chapter of John's Gospel. John lets us know that what Jesus does at the wedding in Cana is "the first of his signs." The first of his signs. We've already established that "firsts" are important. And you know what a sign does: a sign gives information, right? And signs point you in the direction you need to go.

You need to ask yourself then, what is the direction; what is the information that you get about Jesus from his first sign? At first, this might actually seem like kind of underwhelming first miracle. After all, Jesus would go on to heal the diseased, battle demons, and even raise his friend Lazarus from the dead. What he does at the wedding just seems to save a couple from social embarrassment. They run out of wine, so Jesus makes more, problem solved. It's nice—and even amazing—of Jesus to do this, but wouldn't you think he might do something more impressive as his first sign?

Well, let me submit to you that Jesus' miracle is indeed a sign that points us to everything he is. It is almost a living mission statement. Jesus is showing you and me that He is the true Master of the Feast. Why is that important enough to be his first sign? Let's look.

Last week, Sunday afternoon, despite the blowing snow, there was a feast here at St. Mark. It was an unforgettable day, capped off by a wonderful meal and the fellowship that happens when you join other people at the table. So it's not that hard for us to imagine Jesus sitting at a similar celebration, here in John 2 it is a wedding banquet, and he is surrounded by laughter and food and people having a good time. But evidently, His thoughts are far away. Have you ever had that sensation of being somewhere, at a party or get together, but mentally, you're somewhere else? That really seems to be the case with Jesus here. I say that because of this little exchange between Jesus and his mother. He seems preoccupied when Mary comes to him with the news that they've run out of wine. He's pretty short with her, I mean, he doesn't call her Mom, he says, Woman! Why? He tells us. "My hour has not yet come." My hour has not yet come. All throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus talks about his hour, and you know what he's talking about, don't you? The hour of his most intense suffering and finally his death. In chapter 12 Jesus says, "Now my soul is troubled and what should I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this purpose I have come to this hour."

So think about it: Jesus is sitting at this wedding feast thinking about the hour of his suffering and death—which is the price he must pay to win His bride. He's thinking about what he will need to do in order to celebrate with His bride! And don't let that language bother you. It's entirely Biblical. We have one example in today's Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 62, beautiful words: "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall God rejoice over you." Or Ephesians 5, where Paul writes "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, to make her belong to God,

having cleansed her by the washing of water with the Word..." All of us, together, are the "bride" that Jesus suffered and died for. That's the depth of love that your creator has for you.

Speaking of water, that's involved in this first sign, and look what kind of water it is. It was water poured into jars used for Jewish rites of purification. Ceremonial water used for spiritual cleansing. Cleansing water that becomes wine by the word of Jesus. Are you beginning to see where this first sign is pointing? Jesus uses this occasion to demonstrate His kingdom is arriving, and that in his kingdom water and wine will flow. But for what purpose?

For this purpose. He is going to do all the work, and He is going to give you all the credit. Here's what I mean. The MC of this wedding reception comes to the groom and says, "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." Jesus lets the groom take the credit. He doesn't barge into this conversation and say, "Well, you know, I'm really the one responsible for the good wine." He lets the glory pass to the groom. And isn't it stunning that by doing this, John says Jesus manifested His glory. Jesus manifested his glory by letting someone else get the glory. And that is exactly how it works in his kingdom. That's what the Gospel is! Jesus did all the work; lived the perfect life; gave the ultimate sacrifice, the blood, sweat and tears were all His, yet he lets you have His glory. He delights over you like a groom loving his bride. Do you see where this first sign is pointing?

Maybe you do, and maybe you don't, so let me just say this. At Cana, Jesus doesn't just save a wedding party. He makes a powerful statement that wherever He is, there is a party! Wherever Jesus is, there is a Feast! There is celebration and festival joy! Jesus does all the work, and you get all the credit. He throws his arms around you in the water of Holy Baptism and serves you wine and bread for your forgiveness. He rejoices over you like a groom watching his beautiful bride walking down the aisle. And what I want you to know is that this Feast is available now. It's really what gathering in this place is all about.

I understand that many of you are bearing burdens right now. Your hurt, your pain, your grief; it's all valid. You may not feel very joyful today, and truthfully you may not have felt that for some time. If that's true, please hear me. I'm not saying that life with Jesus ought to be only a celebration all the time. I am saying that in the middle of your heartache, Jesus is bringing His Feast to you. He is giving himself to you. He is letting his glory pass to you, and on a day of His choosing, the Feast will continue forever, and everything else will be forgotten. If you believe that, if you let that festival joy into your heart, there's nothing you can't face with the Master of the Feast at your side.