

2nd Sunday After Epiphany

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Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

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[click here to read scripture passages for the day](#)

Jesus and Joy

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Today I hope to talk about the grace, peace, and joy of our Lord Jesus through reflecting on the Gospel of John's first sign of Jesus's ministry. This is fitting for me because I feel that Good Shepherd is the start of my public ministry, and I can't thank you enough for welcoming me into your congregation and allowing me to attempt my first sermon.

In the Gospel lesson today, Jesus went to a wedding of humble families. For the time being, they didn't have to worry about work or where their next meal would come from; they could just celebrate in company with family and friends. It is thought that wedding celebrations were about a week-long feast for all of the families' friends and neighbors. It seems to also be thought that this family did not have as much as others. Cana was a small insignificant city, mentioned only in the Gospel of John. They were just ordinary, humble people who celebrated the joyful occasion of a wedding. Yet this family ran out of wine. As a college student I, for one, know that you do not want to run out of wine at a celebration, but unfortunately that is what happens to this family. This would have been quite an embarrassment for the family. It could have ruined the celebration and been considered a disgrace.

Mary noticed that the wine had run out and she told Jesus, knowing he could do something about it. Is this why Jesus dwelled among us, to increase wine at poor weddings? At first Jesus didn't seem to want to answer his mother's suggestion. He said, "What is it to you or me? My hour has not come." But Mary told the servants to do as he said. He obeyed his mother and then the servants obeyed him. Jesus turned the water into wine as the first sign of his glory and as a result, the disciples believed in him. It was a simple sign of his glory for his own disciples. It seems that no one else but the disciples, servants, and

Mary knew what Jesus had done. The wedding guests were clueless. Jesus was not there to make his glory known to everyone. He was not performing a miracle because someone believed in him.

This is an interesting distinction about the Gospel of John. This gospel writer used signs instead of miracles. What is the difference? Well, a miracle is in the Synoptic Gospels, which are the first gospels written: Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Jesus performed a miracle for someone who believed in him. Someone would come to Jesus with faith that he could heal and Jesus healed because of their belief in him. A sign has the opposite cause and effect relationship. In the Gospel of John, Jesus performed a sign, or a remarkable act, and then people believed in him. In a miracle they first believed and then received a miracle. In a sign, Jesus performed an act and then people believed. In this story, it does not seem to me that Jesus intended to reveal his glory. He was simply at the wedding to celebrate - to help the people's joy. This sign, however insignificant as it seems, is pertinent to his ministry. He performs a sign for his disciples, but the poor wedding guests are the ones who benefit from his glorious act of saving them from disgrace and adding to their joy.

This idea that this passage is all about adding to our joy is developed in Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. The climax of this huge work is a chapter titled "Cana of Galilee." In this part of the book Alyosha, youngest of the three brothers, was contemplating leaving the monastery. He had joined the monastery to find God and forget about his mixed-up family life. However, his mentor had advised Alyosha that he should leave the monastery because he could better serve God and the world if he was not closed off away from everyone. Then his mentor died and a monk read the story of the Wedding at Cana over the casket of the elder. As Alyosha listened to the story he realized the full meaning of the teaching his mentor had passed on to him: Those who love humankind, love their joy. Alyosha left the monastery because he knew that he had gifts to help his family and community sort out some of their trials and he could increase their joy.

Jesus's mother also knew that Jesus could help a family. She knew that he could help his neighbors and add to their joy. Has that ever happened to you? Someone recognized that you have a gift for helping in a certain situation. You aren't even paying attention to anything and your mom says, "Makayla, your brother is struggling to finish a college application." So I say, "What does that have to do with me? If Lukey wouldn't have been watching Netflix all through Christmas break, he wouldn't have this

problem.” And then Mom says, “Lucas, listen to what your sister has to say about your essay.” An hour later your little brother is all applied to college and you celebrate by giving him a big hug and tuning right back into Netflix.

Simple acts of love help each other’s joy. We don’t have to do anything profound. Jesus simply let the party continue. All of us can add to each other’s joy in small ways. We all have our own gifts to serve one another as the second reading from First Corinthians reminds us. Perhaps you share your special toy with a sibling, or do an extra chore around the house to brighten someone’s day, read a book with a friend, or tell a joke to laugh when someone is feeling down.

Jesus’s first sign helped his disciples understand his glory and his glory came through such a humble act of adding to the joy of humankind. His ministry was for the ordinary, hard-working wedding guests that were enjoying a celebration. We, too, can be our own ordinary, hard-working selves that serve each other to help each other’s joy.

Soli Deo Gloria