

The Second Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C
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St Paul's Episcopal Church, Key West, FL
January 16, 2022
Isaiah 62:1-5
Psalm 36:5-10
1 Corinthians 12:1-11
John 2:1-11

The Good Wine Now

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, [and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.]

On the third day. The third day *of* what? The third day *after* what?

The third day of Jesus' public ministry. The third day after Jesus' baptism by John the Baptizer in the Jordan River.

It's a little surprising, isn't it? The other canonical gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, all say that, immediately after his baptism, Jesus went into the wilderness to fast and pray for forty days and nights.

John is different, right? Really different here.

It's Epiphany season, a season of fresh radiance, a season in which over eight Sundays we revisit various encounters of people in scripture with Jesus the Christ, encounters in which they gain new insight, new revelation that in Jesus, God has been made manifest in human form.

First, the visit of the magi. Second, the baptism of Jesus in the River Jordan by his cousin John.

And today, the third of what we sometimes understand as the big three manifestations: the turning of water into wine at a wedding in Cana. On the third day of Jesus' public ministry. On the third day after his baptism.

In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, Jesus' public ministry doesn't begin until after he has fasted and prayed long and hard in the desert and passed through an intense time of testing. Basically, a vision quest sort of experience.

But in John...Jesus is baptized and immediately begins his public ministry.

According to John, on the first day after his baptism, Jesus calls his first disciples.

And according to John, on the second day after his baptism, Jesus calls some more disciples.

Specifically, on the first day he calls Andrew and Peter—not in their boat but at the Jordan River where they like so many others have come to hear John’s preaching and be baptized. On the second day he goes back to Galilee, the region where he and Andrew and Peter are from, and that day he calls Philip and Nathanael.

And on the third day after his baptism, in Galilee, his home region, Jesus and his mother and his brand-new, just-called disciples, all four of them, go to a wedding in the village of Cana.

This is one of those places where we see clearly that John is an Easter gospel. For the entirety of John’s gospel, we encounter a portrait of an Easter Jesus, a resurrected Christ who is triumphant, confident, alive again.

Thinking again of the crucial questions for the communities who composed and prayed together the texts of each gospel, we recall that the crucial question for the community that composed Matthew was, “How do we face change?” And the crucial question for the community that composed Mark was, “How do we move through suffering?” The crucial question for the community that composed John was, “How do we receive joy?”

The joy equation comes through so clearly in this second chapter of John. How do we receive joy? We don’t go to the desert alone. We go to a party with friends.

How did Jesus and his mama from Nazareth, Peter and Andrew from Capernaum, Philip from Bethsaida and Nathanael from we’re not quite sure where all get invited to the same wedding in the village of Cana? Cana, which is due north of Nazareth, southwest of Capernaum, and completely on the other side of the Sea of Galilee from Bethsaida.

The connection is Jesus. From the beginning he has been bringing people from all kinds of places together to celebrate. Once again, the divine made manifest in human form.

It kinda seems like Jesus is planning to just hang out and have a good time at the wedding with everybody else. But then the party is about to come to a screeching halt, and his mom knows he can make a difference.

Does your Mom every do that to you? Did your Mom ever do that to you? “Honey, I know you can help.”

Jesus says, “Mama, it’s not time yet.” She doesn’t even respond to him. She speaks to the staff: “Do whatever he tells you.”

How did water turn into wine at that wedding in Cana? Jesus didn’t do anything. He just gave instructions. And people followed them. *Fill the water jugs up to the brim. Draw some out and take it to the steward*, the emcee of the wedding reception.

The catering staff know what happened, but the emcee doesn’t. He calls the groom aside to congratulate him on his party-throwing prowess. *Good job, Dude, saving the best for now*. The groom is clueless. He had nothing to do with it and is getting credit for it. Jesus’ intervention saves the catering staff, the catering captain, the emcee of the wedding, the newly married couple, and their families from a potential entertaining fail of epic proportions.

How did water turn into wine? And not just any old wine but superb wine, the best wine.

Water *turned into* wine. Something essential to sustain life *turned into* something delightful for those present. One thing transformed into another.

Maybe it isn’t about literal water and wine. Maybe it’s about perception. Openness. Transformation. Experience. Capacity.

Maybe it’s about evaluating what and whom we’re wedded to, married to, what we are committed to for the long haul, an approach and a vision that is sustainable over time.

And maybe it’s about remembering, in the words of Henri-Frédéric Amiel, whom I’ve quoted before and I know others have quoted from this place: “Life is short, and we do not have much time to gladden the hearts of those who travel with us. So, be swift to love and make haste to be kind.”

This is not to say that the past has not happened or that there is nothing in the past for which we need to make amends or reconcile.

Nor is it to say that we need not be strategic about moving into the future.

Nor is it to say that everything everywhere is fine for everyone. Pull up the first news source that appears in your feed, and you will see plenty of evidence that many things are not alright in many places, including outside our doors. So, this is not to say that we don't need to be concerned about our neighbors locally, across the country, and around the world.

Rather, it *is* to say that in the company of Jesus, even in the most dire of circumstances, there is always space for joy and gratitude in the present, which is all we ever have.

Through our relationship with Jesus, we've all been invited to the same party. The same celebration. It's a wedding of who we really are with all God has called us to be.

And so, dear ones, let us drink the good wine, the best wine saved for now, created now, for us, in companionship with Jesus and one other. Let us enjoy the sweetness of this life, together, now.