

The Rev. Joel Petruschke  
Our Saviour Lutheran Church  
January 16, 2022  
Third Sunday after Epiphany

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. Amen.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, in these Sundays after the festival of the Epiphany, which falls on the church calendar on January 6<sup>th</sup>, when the wise men arrived at the nativity, having following the Star of Bethlehem...

In these Sundays after the festival of the Epiphany, we are privy to a number of readings which give us a glimpse into who Jesus is and what Jesus is about.

In these Sundays then after the Epiphany, we actually have a series of epiphanies, a series of revelations.

In these Sundays after the Epiphany, we are blessed with several “a-ha” moments.

That is after all what an epiphany is.

It is an “a-ha” moment.

An epiphany is a revelation.

It is an instance of “Oh, I see.”

Last week, for instance, the church observed the Baptism of our Lord.

And the gospel reading for last Sunday described how at Jesus’ baptism, the heavens opened up, the Spirit of God descended upon Jesus like a dove, and a voice from heaven declared to Jesus, “You are my Son, the Beloved. With you, I am well pleased.”

So, last week’s epiphany entailed the revelation that Jesus is God’s Son, imbued with and empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is the very Son of God the Father.

PAUSE

Today's gospel message imparts another epiphany with respect to Jesus.

The gospel today reveals that Jesus is a miracle worker.

The gospel reveals that Jesus has the power to change water into wine.

Indeed, Jesus has the same creative power of God the Father.

PAUSE

For we know that God the Father is able to create such things as grapes on a grape vine, and is able to fill those grapes on the grape vine with grape juice, and that in turn those grapes can be pressed and then used to make wine.

Yes, God takes water from the sky and from the earth and through a grape vine, God transforms that water into grape juice, and subsequently into wine.

And this...this is a miracle in its own right.

In a similar way, according to our gospel reading, Jesus transforms water in stone jars into wine.

And in this way, we get an example of seeing the macro-level in the micro-level.

Yes, Jesus has the same creative power of God the Father.

And it was C.S. Lewis who said that Jesus' miracles are the small scale version of what God the Father does on the large scale.

Changing water into grape juice in a vineyard is God the Father's miracle working.

Changing water in stone jars into wine is Jesus' smaller version of the same miracle.

PAUSE

In the same way, Jesus miraculously multiplies loaves and fishes at the feeding of 5,000.

And that is the small scale version of God the Father's miracle working.

For God can take a single grain of wheat and God can multiply that grain when it is planted in the ground, such that the stalk produces a head of wheat consisting of a multitude of grains.

And God takes a couple of fish and when they breed they spawn a large number of new fish.

So, again, what God the Father does on the large scale, Jesus does on the small scale in the multiplication of loaves and fish.

Jesus' miracles are the miracles of God the Father in miniature.

## PAUSE

Now, some will argue, "But what Jesus does is different."

Some will argue that Jesus' miracles like the changing of water into wine defies scientific explanation.

Water just doesn't change into wine like that.

To the contrary, it CAN be explained how ground water comes to be grape juice, and how grape juice ferments to become wine.

Or, so we think.

But even though science can explain the processes by which these things happen—how water is transported through a tree, and how grape juice is produce, and how fermentation happens.

Even though science can explain those processes, the question of how a plant knows how to do this...

The question of how a plant evolved to perform these processes is still a conundrum.

In the same way, how do chemical bonds know how to do what they do to change grape juice into wine.

In short, the question of "how" might be answerable, but it is the question of why that is still a mystery, that is still miraculous.

Why does, for instance, our body's respiratory system know that it needs to move air inside us so that we can breathe and provide oxygen for our blood?

Why does our body know that it needs to do this?

We don't even think about it? Our body just does it, instinctively. Why?

Or why does our body know that it needs to produce antibodies when it receives a COVID-19 vaccination?

We don't sit down that think to ourselves, "Okay, I am going to send out a message to create an immune response for my body."

No, our body just does it, instinctively. Why?

The "how" of the process is explainable by science, which is how scientists can create vaccines in the first place.

But it is the "why" that is mysterious, that is miraculous.

Our body has evolved to do this, but "why?" Who set it in motion? Who made it come to be like this?

And ultimately, we are left with the answer of God.

PAUSE

When we read then this story about the wedding in Cana...

And we examine the miracle in this story...

We should not be so spellbound by the miracle that water becomes wine, which defies scientific explanation.

Yes, that is neat. Yes, that is some wild chemistry experiment.

But what is more spellbinding is the fact that God in the person of Jesus Christ deems it necessary to do this.

In other words, the question of "why" is more significant.

Why does Jesus change water into wine in this story?

Why does God the Father change water into grape juice in a vineyard?

Why does God the Father make it possible for fermentation to happen, such that grape juice turns into wine?

And it is the context of this story which helps answer these questions.

The story here is about a wedding.

It is a most joyous occasion.

But notice what the text says, “The mother of Jesus, Mary...tells Jesus, ‘They have no wine.’”

The wine has given out.

And the problem is presented as though it is almost like some existential crisis.

“They have no wine.”

Oh, my gosh. What are they going to do? Someone tell Jesus.

“They have no wine.”

Seems rather trivial, but, the image of wine here conveys a larger message.

It is not just that this wedding party has no more wine.

No, but it is that the world is without wine.

For wine here is symbolic of joy.

PAUSE

Interestingly enough, this story of Jesus turning an abundance of water into wine, may have had a connection to the Greek God of wine, Dionysus, whose shrine was not far from Cana.

And Dionysus is said to change water into wine on the annual date of January 6<sup>th</sup>.

Thus, it may be that the early church took over the festival of Dionysus, on January 6<sup>th</sup>, making it the day when in fact Jesus performed his miracle of changing water into wine.

But whereas the Greek god Dionysus was associated with revelry, and partying.

Whereas Dionysus was associated with unbridled merrymaking...

Apart from that kind of joy, the joy that surrounds the wine of Jesus is different.

For Jesus is himself the preeminent joy God the Father brings to the world.

In fact, when the steward says, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.”

The steward’s words here are meant to be understood as a commentary on the state of the world.

Whatever came before Jesus, in terms of religion and spirituality, was at best a warmup for what was coming, namely Jesus Christ.

It is like rock concerts where there are opening acts.

People go to a rock concert to see the main attraction, but if they get to the concert early they are entertained by the opening act.

But it is really the headliner people are there to see.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, Friends, there may have been opening acts that preceded Jesus, but make no mistake about it, the headliner is Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the joy God brings to the world. Jesus is our joy because Jesus is the one who brings the promise of new life.

Jesus is our joy because he does bring the answer to our existential crisis, that crisis being that we are mortals, that we will all die one day.

But in Jesus there is the promised hope of resurrection, and so there is great joy.

This may be why our gospel reading today begins with the words, “On the third day...”

“On the third day there was wedding...”

“On the third day...” reminds us that “On the third day...” Jesus was raised from the dead.

This story then begins with “On the third day...” to tip us off to the fact that there is deep symbolism going on here.

It is NOT a story about “wine giving out at a wedding in a backwater village.”

No, it is a story about what is the source of joy for the world.

PAUSE

Ultimately, then, what we see is that passage is that every miracle in life, everything unexplainable thing God does in this world, is for the purpose of bringing joy to God's creation.

The miracle of birth brings joy. The miracle of family and friends is for the sake of bringing joy.

The miracle of home and hearth is for joy. The miracle of our bodily systems functioning well is for our joy.

The miracle of spring, the miracle of sunlight, the miracle of rain, the miracle of flowers, of birds, of rainbows, and the beauty of creation all around us is for our joy.

Every miraculous event is an act of God for the sake of bringing joy.

PAUSE

And the miracle of people who are loving and kind, generous, and forgiving, merciful and caring...this, too, is a miracle of God.

You and I are miracles of God if we bestow joy to others by the words and deeds we perform in this world.

PAUSE

The "how" of many natural processes that take place in this world can be explained by science.

But the "why" these processes takes place can only be explained by the mystery of God, which starts from the place of sharing joy.

That is the compass, so it would seem, for our lives—to extend God's joy out into the world.

And so, to withhold joy is to go counter to the will of God.

Be a miracle. Share God's joy. Share God's joy most especially by remarking to others that God has blessed us with the promise of new life in his Son Jesus Christ.

For Jesus is our source of all joy. Thanks be to God. Amen.