

16 January 2022 – The 2nd Sunday after The Epiphany: John 2:1-11

Today's Gospel is a favorite with Episcopalians: Jesus the winemaker, even home delivery! And no discount stuff; this wine is primo!

There are many ways to interpret the Scriptures: First, there is the literal sense, which meant something different to earlier Christians than to us. They did not get into debates about whether a passage was historically accurate; they assumed the writer was truthful, and the first task was to understand what the writer wrote. However, no one stopped there. They assumed there are deeper meanings which may be moral, theological, anthropological, spiritual, or a combination. Until relatively recently Biblical scholars understood their work to be more that of archeologists than detectives. Today's Gospel is an example of this layers-of-meaning approach. So, let's start digging.

Details mentioned in the Scriptures are not 'bare facts' but are important to our understanding. For instance, John mentions the number of stone jars, six. If you think of when the number six is important in the Bible you quickly remember the creation story in Genesis. God creates in six days. Indeed, Genesis keeps popping up early in John's Gospel: Chapter 1:1-18, is an obvious 'harkening back' and a 'filling in the full meaning' of Genesis 1. That there were six stone jars tells us Jesus is doing something that is linked to and as important as God's creation of the universe.

John specifically mentions the jars are for purification rites, which means they would not have been used for other purposes, such as storing wine. Here is a sign that what Jesus is doing is not dependent on former conditions, his mission is not a mere continuation of the past but something new.

Jesus calls for water to fill the jars, up to the brim. God creates life out of nothing, and that life is good. Life itself indicates God's goodness; all life participates in God's goodness. We can waste life, but we are made to enjoy God and God's creation. Yet when we do, think, and say that which separates us from God, the origin and end of true life, we are not alive: we stagnate, useless to ourselves and others. We are already filled to the brim with life; but as good, or as bad, as we might think our lives are now, there is miracle awaiting us.

The six inanimate stone jars are filled to the brim with life-giving water, and Jesus asks the servants to draw some out and take it to the person in charge. We know that somehow—the wedding guests do not witness the miracle, it happens in secret—somehow the life-giving water becomes the most satisfying wine. In the same way, when we accept the life that God gives us and follow Jesus' command to share such life, miracles happen. Just as the steward and the guests would not have known about the new, glorious wine unless the servants had brought it to them, we are to bring the new, glorious life of Jesus Christ into all our environments and relationships. Followers of Jesus are doer's: sharing the grace of Christ as servant-ministers.

John tells us that everyone was astonished, except the servants. They knew from whom the new, glorious wine came. We know from whom our life and salvation come, but as in the story, it's not about us. We 'carry the water become wine' the true miracle. We are to bring the new, glorious life of Jesus to others so that He may do his miracles in their lives.

The steward is dumbfounded because it seems backwards: the good wine saved for last. We can be intoxicated with caricatures of true, abundant life. We settle for slight momentary joy instead of running to the deep, everlasting joy of Christ. We want, and on some level know we are made for, ecstasy but we settle for merely physical, temporary joy. All earthly joys are shadows of what Jesus gives. The best is yet to come—new, glorious life in Jesus Christ, so much more challenging, more rewarding.

The story ends: *Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory...* The first sign; there will be more. No one sign of Jesus' love and salvation is the whole story. Indeed, there are endless signs of God's loving-kindness in Christ because there is no end to God's loving-kindness. Often Jesus' miracles are hidden, recognized after the fact—yet reveal His glory. As we bear Christ's mercy and grace into the world, our faith is strengthened, our belief confirmed. And as we share Christ's new, glorious Life we become ever more his servants and his joy is perfected in us.

Blessing and honor, thanksgiving and praise, more than we can offer, more than we can conceive, be yours, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, by all angels, all mortals, all creatures, now and forever. Amen.