

A New Thing

John 2:1-11
Epiphany 2; Series C

Our God fills up what is lacking. This is what we learn from the story of the Wedding at Cana. Jesus, his mother, and the disciples were invited to a wedding. In New Testament times a wedding was a big deal. It was celebrated for seven days with a feast. On the third day of this feast, disaster strikes. They had run out of wine at the feast. The host or master of the feast was in quite a predicament. He was on the brink of shame and embarrassment as he was the one responsible for making certain there were enough provisions. Coming up empty of such supplies was a social disgrace.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, went to the one she knew could do something about it. She went to “Messiah on the scene.” At the time of her conception the angel told her information about Jesus. She knew that his name was Jesus “because he would save the people from their sins” (Mt 1:21). She demonstrates in different ways in the Gospel narratives that she does not know precisely what this means. She does not know exactly who her son is and how he will go about his work. She is close, but never “spot on.” But she does know enough about her son and his work to know that he is the one to go to when you are in need. She does know that he can fill up what is lacking.

By bringing forth his own choice vintage from stone jars filled with water, our Lord not only saved a wedding gone wrong and prevented a potential “bride-zilla” from wreaking havoc, he also transformed the Jewish ideas about purification. In the Jewish purification system, uncleanness could be contracted in a number of ways—through contact with the sick, diseased, or dead, for instance. The unclean person then was closed off from the place of worship and from close contact with those in the community. The uncleanness could be remedied by washing with water and waiting for a period of time.

Stone vessels, like the ones we read about in the story of the Wedding at Cana, were often used for such a washing since the stone was not subject to contaminants found in vessels of other materials. By filling the stone vessels with the wine that was lacking, Jesus also foreshadows the way that he will fill up what is lacking in the Jewish purification system. He foreshadows the purity of forgiveness of sins and a holy relationship with God that could only be achieved with the wine-reddened blood of Mary’s firstborn son, God himself in the flesh. Through Christ’s crucifixion God will purge away the impurity and guilt of sin. Once and for all he will destroy the power of sin to separate a person from worship with God and a fellowship with the community of God’s people. God performs a work of compassion and mercy by transforming the old into something new in order to fill up what is lacking.

Today we witnessed God manifesting his glory. In the last verse of the Gospel reading this morning, the Evangelist St. John writes, “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him” (Jn 2:11). In his very first miracle Jesus manifested his glory by transforming something old into something new in order to supply what was lacking.

Today we witnessed a baptism. We saw God use water and his holy Word to manifest his glory by transforming the old self into a new self, recreated in the image of God in Christ (Col 3). In the old self, the image of God was lost. God supplied it. In the old self faith and trust in God was lacking. God supplied it. In the process he manifested his glory just

as he did at your baptism and mine. He recreated you and me as his beloved children and new creations. We are born again by the water and the Spirit (Jn 3:5).

Today is also sanctity of human life Sunday. We remember that our God is the Lord of life. He who rose from the dead never to die again did so because to him every human life is precious. As Dr. Seuss once said, "A person's a person no matter how small." And God desires to manifest his glory in the life of every one of his created persons. "For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God, so turn and live" (Ez 18:32).

As members of the church, then, we are a manifestation of God's glory and a display of his work to transform the old into something new in order to supply what is lacking. In the miracle at the Wedding of Cana the servants witnessed Jesus transform the old into something new in order to supply the wine for the wedding feast that was lacking. They saw Jesus manifest God's glory. They were witnesses that validated the miracle. Also, the master of the feast verified the quality of the new thing that Jesus created. What is more, the people received the benefits of that new wine and St. John records that the disciples believed in him. When God's glory is manifested in the presence and person of Jesus, good things happen. Faith is created and joy abounds.

In the Bible wine is a symbol of physical and spiritual joy (Gen 27:28; Ec 9:7). Wine is also the symbol of future hope (Is 25:6; Jl 2:19; Zech 10:6-7) and of abundance (Jl 2:24; 3:18; Am 9:13). So, when Jesus turns water into wine at the Wedding of Cana and manifests God's glory, we learn a wonderful truth about God in Christ. We learn that in the presence of Jesus there is always abundance and joy. Let us then, as baptized new creations, more fully manifest God's glory with what we say, think, and do. In us life was lacking. Faith was lacking. God's image was lacking. His glory was lacking. God supplied it. So let us more fully make known the presence of God in Christ through the power of his Spirit so that others may see and experience his joy in abundance. Let us do this so that God in Christ may manifest his glory by transforming others into new creations in order to supply faith that is lacking.

All the while God gives us a feast to partake of so that we may continue to receive not only abundant joy, but abundant life, and salvation in his presence. We come together this morning to receive a manifestation of God's glory and to have our fill of the compassion, mercy, and love for others that has been lacking. Even now, every time that we come together to receive the Lord's Supper together, God fills us full to the brim with forgiveness that he knows we need. He does this just as he once averted a wedding disaster by filling stone jars to the brim with the finest wine.

The Biblical writers speak about the eternal life with God as a wedding feast. A wedding feast in which the bride, the church, will celebrate with Christ, her bridegroom. And at this wedding feast there will be no lack. There will only be abundance and joy. May we live now in hope of all that God has planned for us, his new creatures. Amen.