

SERMON FOR JANUARY 16, 2022

TEXT: JOHN 2: 11

THEME: SIGNS

This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

In the name of Jesus:

Signs, they are everywhere. Simple images which convey important meanings. Neglect the sign and its message at your own peril, or at your own embarrassment.

A few years ago I attended a sporting event in Arizona at an arena that I was unfamiliar with. During a break in the action I went to use the facilities. Oops, wrong room, I walked into the women's room instead of the men's room. Fortunately, no one else was in there, because that would have been an embarrassing moment, to be sure. If I had only taken time to not only look at the sign but also to correctly interpret the sign.

When we neglect the signs around us, we do so not only to our shame and embarrassment, but also to our harm and determinant. If you are out driving your car and you neglect the red octagonal sign that says STOP, you may cause an accident. Many accidents on the roads have occurred because the drivers have not noticed or taken into account the road signs that are in place.

Today the Apostle John tells us about one of Jesus' first miracles, the turning of water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana. And at the conclusion of John's recording of this miracle, he writes this: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."

Today marks the Second Sunday after the Epiphany, and throughout the Gospel readings of the season leading up to Ash Wednesday in March, we will take note of a number of signs which show us who Jesus really is. That is what the season of Epiphany is all about, manifesting or showing us who Jesus really is. But if we neglect or fail to heed the messages that are conveyed in these signs, we do so to our own eternal peril. And the first sign that speaks to us is the sign where Jesus turns water into wine.

To set the scene, it is a festival celebration at a wedding feast in Cana. But the celebration is at a dead end, because the hosts have run out of wine. No one knows what to do. Yes, they could drink water for the rest of the celebration, but wine in the Jewish culture was more than a drink, it was a symbol, or a sign, of joy and celebration. To be without wine would effectively tell the celebrants that there is now no cause for celebration, no reason to celebrate, for as one rabbi put it: "There is no rejoicing except with wine."

So what to do? Jesus' mother, Mary, has an idea. She approached Jesus, telling Him about the situation, and then, in faith, went to say to the servants: "Do whatever He tells you to do." Jesus told them to take the stone jars and fill them with water. These jars held between 20-30 gallons of water. Telling the servants to fill them to the brim, the servants then followed Jesus' directions to then give some to the master of the feast. When the master tasted it, he was amazed, the water had turned to wine, such fine wine that he remarked: "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." And the celebration continued, and verse 11 then plainly states: "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."

Signs are meant to not only be noticed, but the message that the sign conveys is meant to be heeded. Jesus performed this sign at Cana and showed that He was not any ordinary human being. Every other person in the room could not and would not be able to accomplish what Jesus did in turning the water into wine. This sign showed Jesus' compassion and was an act of love and mercy. Certainly Jesus could have ignored the situation and the request of Mary, but He didn't. There was a need, and Jesus responded, in compassion and love. Saving the master of the feast from embarrassment, Jesus not only

turned the water into wine, but did so in such a simple yet spectacular manner that it was said that this wine, this new wine, was the best of all of the wine that was served. The master noted that the best was saved for last.

This sign of turning the water into wine, along with the other signs that Jesus did, all pointed to the greatest sign that God loved sinners and desires not the death of the sinner but that all would live. This sign, as well as the other signs Jesus would give, all pointed to the greatest sign of God's love for sinners, that God spared not His own Son but delivered Him up for us all. His death on the cross for the sins of the world and His resurrection from the grave to defeat sin, Satan, and death, for all who believe in Him.

Dear friend, the turning of water into wine indeed took place, and the meaning of this sign for us is profound. For in the turning of water into wine Jesus changes and makes all things new. Ordinary water is turned into the best of wines. And isn't that what God does to each of us? Each and everyone of us has sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We march on throughout our lives in a march towards death. Yet Christ changes us! In the ordinary waters of our Baptism, we pass from death to life. In Baptism we have been made into new creatures, created to serve the Lord and to manifest His glory by the power of His Holy Spirit, professing and confessing our faith in Jesus with our lips, and then living out our faith in Christ by using the gifts that He

has given to us to His glory and the building up of His Church. For just as there are now a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit, there are also a variety of ways in which you can serve the Lord, empowered by the Spirit, to testify and to show others the love that God has for them in Jesus. Just as the water turned into wine was a sign, that sign sent a message that required a response. The disciples saw it and believed. So too the miracles, the life, death and resurrection of Jesus are signs of God's love for sinners, of God's love for you. These signs require a response. How will you respond?

G. K. Chesterton was a noted author who lived in England in the early 20th century. He was traveling on a train, absorbed in the book he was reading. He suddenly awoke to his surroundings and discovered that he was on a train but he had forgotten where he was going. So, he got off the train at the next station and sent his wife a telegram, and the telegram said: "I am here, but I have no idea where I need to be." With that his wife sent him a message back saying, "look at your ticket, that will tell you where you need to be."

That is the problem some face as Christians. We have not only forgotten where we are going, many of us have forgotten that we have a ticket! We have the habit of forgetting about Jesus and diminishing Jesus' power by our lack of faith in Him, in our worry and anxieties of things present and the future. We forget that Jesus cares for us in our ordinary lives and that He wants to use us

in powerful ways to show His love for others. Today Jesus reminds us in this first sign that He did, in turning the water into wine, that He has given to us His Spirit not only faith but also a variety of gifts to be used for His purpose and to His honor and glory. Even when we do not understand what is going on in our lives He calls us to have the faith that Mary had, “Do whatever He tells you.” And when we trust in Jesus, He indeed does great things in and through us, to show others of His love!

To the glory of God and in Jesus’ name

Amen