

2 EPIPHANY

JANUARY 10/13/14 2018

Psalm 104:14-16

FIRST, MARSHALL

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JOHN 2:1-11

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we believe and in believing we obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.



So Christmas is hardly over, and suddenly Jesus is already grown-up. People wonder about Jesus' childhood, but there just aren't that many stories of his younger years. We know that he was:

-born in a barn,

-blessed in the temple,

-fled with his family to Egypt for a few years before they settled in Nazareth,

-and that as a 13 year old he scared the life out of his parents when they went to the big city of Jerusalem for a festival. Remember that story?

When the holiday comes to an end, the Mary and Joseph's clan all leave town together...at least Jesus' parents **think** he's traveling with the cousins...until they discover that he's **not!!!** So they rush back to the city and search...

For **THREE DAYS** they can't find him anywhere! Fearing that he's dead (or something worse!) they finally go to the Temple...where they find the boy talking with the religious leaders about God – all of whom are amazed at what he knows.

That's the story of Jesus' childhood in a nutshell.

Then last week you heard about Jesus as an adult who spoke with some men who would become his disciples. In today's passage, we hear about Jesus' first miracle or sign. That's the opening to **John's** version of the gospel story.

As you probably know, there are three other authors in the Bible who wrote stories about Jesus called **gospels** – Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Though all four gospel writers describe the Passion story (the events of Jesus' life, suffering and death on the cross), each one begins their saga with an event in Jesus' life that is the sign, the symbol, the brand, if you will, of that author's message about Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of the Living God.

Here's a thumbnail sketch of each:

Matthew's gospel cements the image of Christ as a TEACHER of God's Holy Law – you remember words. The Lord says:

*-Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God...and
 -Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth...and
 -You have heard that it was said, You shall not murder...**but I say to you**...*

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus's first and, most important, act is to teach people about God's Holy Law.

Mark's gospel story goes cosmic almost right out of the gate.

Jesus is baptized, calls a few followers, and IMMEDIATELY is confronted by a man who is possessed by a demon. If Matthew's Jesus is teaching people how to live a God-directed life, Mark's Jesus is showing people that he is the Messiah with power to defeat the enemies of God – especially Satan and his demons.

In **Luke's Gospel**, Jesus' first act is to preach good news to the lowly and poor, but his first sign is also an exorcism – yet the emphasis in this third Gospel is of the Lord as a great healer of people who are sick or in need.



But in **John's** gospel, as I mentioned, Jesus' very first sign...is to change some water into wine – Turns out it's a **lot** of water that becomes a **lot** of **very good wine**, but **still...**

At **first** glance (to me, anyway!) turning some water into wine...just doesn't seem quite as important as:

- TEACHING about GOD, or
- DEFEATING a demon of SATAN, or even
- HEALING people who are hurting...

Do you agree???

Yet, even though this *water-into-wine* miracle is not as obvious as, say:

- a teaching, or
- an exorcism, or
- a healing...John DOES NOT leave us wondering about its meaning. In the last verse of our passage for today, John tells us:

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

No **explanation** for it is given, but the wonderful **effect** of this miracle is described: IN IT, the glory of Jesus is revealed; and THROUGH IT, the faith of the disciples is created... Isn't that God's goal for us all??? That in the story of Jesus Christ, YOU AND I might hear of his glory, and through it, have faith in the one true God...

So let's see if we can figure out what's going on here...see what makes this event so important that John would choose it as his way to introduce the world to the only Son of God!

Back in those days, a **wedding celebration** would last for a whole week – families and friends would come together and feast for six straight days – having fun:

- telling stories,
- getting in arguments,
- playing games,
- renewing relationships,
- bringing up past hurts,
- forgiving others

all those things that go on at a family reunion.

And as important as it was to have **food**, the host family **also** provided the **wine** – which was **very** important for a couple of reasons:

1. Wine was a **necessity** because the people couldn't count on having fresh water to drink due to the heat, bacteria...all that stuff. And,
2. Wine was also counted as one of God's greatest blessings for life – so it was vital to have enough wine for everyone for the entire week...

Well...you heard the story – **THREE DAYS** into the celebration, the party looks like it's dying...on the vine (so to speak!). The wine runs out: someone didn't order enough, and soon the family will be wallowing in shame!!

Now, when Jesus' mom notices the problem, she goes to her son and says to him, *They have no wine...*



...Mary's NOT just REPORTING the bad news, is she...?

What's her goal???

In the early years of our marriage, Carolyn's extended family would have a big yearly reunion on a lake up north. Her mom, Lenore, had seven sisters and one brother – so there was always a mass of: blond-haired, white-haired, bald-headed, blue-eyed, old-and-young relatives – running, swimming, drinking coffee and talking.

Also, there was always a sense of a shared history that hovered over the gathering...which included favorite family fables, many magical moments, a few infamous follies, and, inevitably, some sibling spats...

On one occasion, someone said apparently something that caused my mother-in-law, Lenore, to feel upset. So Carolyn did what she'd done since her father had died: when something in the family needed fixing...she went to Greg, her oldest brother, and simply said, *Mom's upset...*

She wasn't just REPORTING the bad news, was she...? You weren't there, you didn't hear or see the exchange...but still you know what happened, right? Greg got up and went to make sure that Lenore was ok.

They have no wine... Mary's NOT just REPORTING the bad news... She tells Jesus about the wine running out...because...WHY? SHE KNOWS that HE can FIX IT, right??

But...Jesus doesn't seem too interested in helping – in fact, he says in a bare-bones **cold-hearted** way, *Woman, that's not my problem or yours – besides, the time is not right!* Ouch...

It's a response that captures our attention for a couple of reasons:

1. We just don't picture Jesus ever being rude, or even short-tempered, right?
2. And we especially don't expect him to be rude...to Mary, his Mother!!!

Yet here his comment stands, and every attempt to explain it away seems to come up short...

Martin Luther has a common-sense insight on this uncomfortable interaction between mother and son. He's certain that Jesus' response to Mary was intended as a rebuke. *How could it be anything else?* Luther asks. Mary comes to him for help, and he says to her... **Woman**...

Not Mama, not Mom, not even Mother...but WOMAN... They are words that are serious and convey even a sense of superiority as if he were speaking to some servant who had slipped-up on something significant ... and that may be the case.

Yet I can't help thinking that we're missing two very important pieces of the **conversation equation**. We **don't** get to hear mother and son speak their words, **nor** do we get to watch them when they talk – which are two very important clues to help us figure out what someone's really saying in **any** conversation, right?



What we're doing is reading the *email* or *text* version of their conversation. We need some emoji's to help us fill out the intent!

So we know that some significant non-verbal communication passed between the two – that always happens - especially in a tense conversation. For no sooner has Jesus rejected his mother's request to help...than... **What does she do?** She turns to the servants and says: ***DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU!***

That's quite an unexpected response, no???

I mean, imagine how YOUR mother would have responded in that situation. And you who ARE mothers – how would **you** feel to be so publicly rebuked by your child??? I know how MY mom would have responded:

- her eyes would have welled up with tears
- her face would have shown confusion, and
- her happy spirit would have been wounded and bruised.

Yet...it seems as if Mary feels none of that. We're told **nothing** about her **reaction**...only her **response**!

When Jesus says to her, *Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come!* she turns to the servants and says, **DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU!** Something Jesus does gives Mary the freedom to move forward. She is so certain that her concern will be addressed in spite of Jesus' apparent rebuke, that she gets the team ready for action!

So here's where my mind went with wondering about the non-verbal communication between mother and son:

When Mary tells Jesus, *They have no wine*, I'm thinking her son shook his head, grimaced a little smile, and said in so many words:

Mom...Woman! It's not our problem – and besides, the time will soon be here when I'll be asked to help everyone...everywhere!

And I'm thinking that Mary looked right back at him with a little smile of her own, and gave him a look that said, ***These folks need your help now...it's as good a time and place to start as any!***

And then I think he smiled, and nodded, which was Mary's clue to spread the word that something amazing was about to happen.

Do whatever he tells you, she says to the servants.



You know the rest of the story:

Jesus instructs them to fill the washing jars with water, which they do. Then he tells them to fill a cup and take it to the Master of Ceremonies. When the man tastes it, ***he is amazed!*** It's the best wine they've had yet – plus, there are six huge jars of it!

The celebration is saved, and we learn 3 important lessons from this great story.

1. You gotta listen to MOM, right? Mom almost always knows best!
2. Jesus is the source of God's unending supply of absolutely amazing grace – it's the best wine possible and there's more than enough for everyone.
3. Finally, Mary gives us words to live by: ***Do whatever Jesus says!***

Like:

- Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind – and love your neighbors as yourself.
- Turn the other cheek.
- Feed the hungry, visit the lonely, comfort the sick...
- Come to him, all who are weary and heavily burdened, and he will give you rest.

Do whatever Jesus says! Those are good news words to live by. Amen.