

The Church of Saint Mary the Virgin
The Second Sunday After the Epiphany
John 2:1-11

The Glory of Everyday Life

The Rev. Dr. Patrick S. Cheng
January 16, 2022

Before I begin, I would just like to thank Fr. Jay for the invitation to preach today. It's a blessing to be here with all of you.

And I would like to wish everyone a happy Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend. As Dr. King taught us, the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice. But unfortunately the arc doesn't bend itself. And so I give thanks today for the life-giving and arc-bending ministry of Dr. King – as well as for all those who have followed in his footsteps.

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Last month, I attended a family wedding in Cleveland. It was the first extended family gathering that I had been to in over two years.

I don't think I was prepared for just how strange a wedding could be during a time of COVID.

First, the travel. Instead of taking an hour-long flight to Ohio, my husband Michael and I decided to bypass the airport and drive. We ended up driving for seven and a half hours each way. Let's just say that we got to know the geography of central Pennsylvania quite well.

Second, the social events. Once we arrived, we pretty much kept our masks on the whole time. Other than the wedding ceremony itself, we didn't stay for very long at any given event. We even kept our masks on during the wedding banquet – except when we were actually eating.

And so it was a very strange wedding indeed.

But despite the awkwardness of the masking and the social distancing, it was amazing to interact with my family members in three dimensions. It was wonderful to catch up and joke around and laugh with my brother and sister-in-law from California. And it was incredible to hug my mom and my aunts – quite carefully, of course.

There was something very special about being physically present with loved ones, as opposed to the Zoom gatherings that we've all grown so accustomed to.

Looking back, I realized that nothing could stop our family's love from shining through our masks and the social distancing. Ultimately, nothing stood in the way of the love that we had for each other.

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Today is the Second Sunday After the Epiphany. During Epiphany-tide, the church celebrates the revelation of Jesus Christ's glory in the world. Epiphany comes from the Greek word *ἐπιφάνεια* (*epiphaneia*), which means a "revealing" or a "showing." Epiphany is also related to the word *ἐπιφανής* (*epiphanes*), which means a "shining forth."

So if the season of Advent is about waiting, and the season of Christmas is about adoring, then the season after the Epiphany is about seeing – seeing the glory of Christ shine all around us.

Today we hear about how Jesus' glory was revealed through his very first miracle. That miracle was, of course, the turning of water into wine at the wedding at Cana. As the gospel reading tells us, this was the "first of his signs," and it "manifested his glory."

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Now I suspect that most of you are quite familiar with the story of the wedding at Cana.

Jesus is with his mother and disciples at a wedding. We don't know why they are there. But we do know that the guests are having such a good time that the wine runs out.

Mary, Jesus' mother, tells him that "They have no wine" – suggesting that he do something about it. Jesus is annoyed by his mother's request and resists initially. "O woman, what have you to do with me?," he asks her. (You've got to love the cranky Jesus.)

But Jesus ultimately listens to his mom, and he instructs the servants to pour water into six large stone jars that were used for the Jewish rites of purification, filling them up to the brim. And immediately the water turns into wine. The head steward is so impressed with the quality of the wine that he tracks down the groom and praises him for saving the best wine for last. Which is, of course, not true.

And so that's Jesus' first miracle.

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So what is the significance of this gospel reading for us today? How might it speak to us – beyond being an impressive "magic trick" of sorts?

Well, some theologians have read this story as an allegory about the Old and New Testaments. They've argued that the story is actually about replacing the old covenant with the

new. That is, the water represents the Mosaic law, whereas the wine represents grace and the gospel. By changing the water into wine, Jesus inaugurates the new covenant.

Other theologians have understood this story as an allegory for the eschatological feast that will occur at the end of time. We hear about such a celebration in today's first lesson. In that reading, God speaks through the prophet Isaiah and says that Jerusalem will be vindicated and saved one day, and that God will rejoice over Zion as a bridegroom rejoices over a bride.

According to this eschatological reading, Jesus is the true bridegroom, and the wedding at Cana prefigures Jesus' own heavenly wedding to his bride, the church. The large quantity of wine is a symbol of God's overflowing grace at the Supper of the Lamb.

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While both of these allegorical readings are important, I have a different view of the significance of today's gospel passage.

For me, today's gospel text is important because it reminds us that Jesus' first miracle or sign occurred in the midst of everyday life.

The initial revelation of Jesus' glory could have taken place in the Temple at Jerusalem or in some other official religious space. But it didn't. (Note that, in Jesus' time, weddings were almost entirely secular affairs and were held at home.)

This revelation could also have taken place in front of the political, economic, or intellectual elites of Jesus' day. But it didn't. Instead, Jesus chooses to reveal his glory during a celebration in a small village in the northern part of ancient Israel. An everyday party with everyday people. And, frankly, a party that was so modest that it ran out of wine before it was over.

All too often, we think of the sacred or the divine as being confined to churches, cathedrals, seminaries, or other religious spaces. But that's not what Jesus' first sign teaches us. It teaches us that the revelation – or epiphany – of Jesus' glory is often found in the midst of everyday life.

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Where, in your daily life, have you seen the glory of Jesus Christ revealed? Perhaps you recently witnessed someone committing a random act of loving kindness. Perhaps you experienced a moment of peace and joy in the middle of a rough day. Or perhaps you saw the arc of the moral universe bend – ever so slightly – towards justice.

Let's face it, things are really hard right now as we enter into the third full year of the pandemic. Sometimes it feels like God is really far away from all of the pain or drudgery of our daily lives.

But the good news of the wedding at Cana is that the glory of Jesus Christ is revealed not just in things like liturgy, scripture, and sacrament – but also in the midst of everyday life. Even if you haven't attended a wedding or a family gathering recently, that glory is always there – you just have to look for it.

In the same way that nothing could stop the love of my family from shining through at the wedding that I attended last month, nothing can stop the glory of Christ from shining forth in our daily lives.

That is the good news of the Epiphany. That is the good news of the wedding at Cana. And that, my friends, is the good news of the incarnation.