

Epiphany 2C  
January 17, 2010  
Hymns: 566 - 601 - 311 - 82 v2,5

**JOHN 2:1-11**  
**“SIMPLE” MIRACLE....COMPLEX ISSUES:**  
**\*Why Do Bad Things Happen In Good Christian Homes?**  
**\*How Could Mary Seem So Forceful With Jesus?**  
**\*Why So Much Wine?**  
**\*Why “This Miracle”?**

May the God of peace fill you with all joy in believing His power to work miracles! Amen!

Dear disciples of the Christ,

**Slide 2 Jesus’ first miracle was performed at a wedding.** You know the story. A wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother Mary was there, as well as Jesus and His disciples. But something happened that cast a pall on things. They ran out of wine. This was most embarrassing for the family hosting the wedding. It seems like a frivolous use of Jesus’ power, really--water to wine. It’s been the subject of a host of low-brow humor. Like the Baptist preacher who was caught with a load of moonshine whiskey. He claimed he was just hauling water. When confronted with the fact that it was whisky rather than water, he exclaimed, “It’s a miracle! Our blessed Lord has done it again!”

With a world before Him to save....and Jesus spent His time changing water to wine so that the bridegroom would not be embarrassed?! In reality, this “simple miracle” presents a host of complex issues. From an early age, I already felt this story raised more questions than it answered. Maybe that’s the way it’s supposed to be with the first miracle of Jesus. But at any rate, let’s take a look at *Simple Miracle....Complex Issues*.

First off, if you think about it for a moment, you will see that this miracle is quite in keeping with the character of Christ. (**slide 3**) **Here we see Jesus’ concern for a young couple.** Jesus cares about people. Someone on the groom’s side of the family was obviously responsible for the wine. Whoever it was would be deeply humiliated if they ran out. But everyone would be affected. Who wants to see a bride disappointed on her wedding day? So, when Mary asked Jesus to intervene, we should not be surprised that even though He expressed reluctance since “His time had not yet come,” He ultimately did intervene.

It is interesting that He was at first reluctant. Evidently miracles are not to be taken lightly. We do that, don’t we? We often take miracles lightly. We use the term quite loosely. A football team, a considerable underdog, pulls out a victory at the last moment. It’s exciting. What do we call it? A miracle--as if God really cares who wins a football game. Now! – Does God really care when a wedding couple runs out of wine? From this miracle, the answer appears to be “yes!” My wife and I have had three married children for some now. They all have had their trials and tribulations already in their short years of marriage. Have we prayed?! You can be sure! Were there times and places in our own marriage – in yours – that called for prayer? No question!

Isn’t it comforting to know that you and I and our problems are not so small that Jesus does not hear? Whether we think we or our problem are too small – or too big! – for God, isn’t it our sin that we have not taken it to the Lord in prayer?! He cares! This miracle proves it! *Oh, what peace we often forfeit, Oh what needless pain we bear – All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!* First thing let’s learn from this miracle that Jesus cares! – no matter who you are or how small your problem. Take it to Him in prayer!

A second complexity of this account is Mary’s role. She goes to Jesus and says, “*They have no more wine.*” Friends, this is more than just an announcement on Mary’s part! Jesus’ response indicates that He knows exactly what she is asking: She wants a miracle! Furthermore, her expectation of the same is underscored by her instruction to the servants: “*Do whatever He tells you.*” Unless you have been living in a cave all your life, you understand this presents a real complexity for Lutherans trying to deal with Roman Catholics who pray to Mary, as “the mother of God.” Roman Catholic theology is heavily weighted on Mary being the queen of heaven and having more than strings to pull with Christ. He does what she says! - according to their beliefs. And so, they have their rosary, in which they pray, Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us....” And

they expect results....that she can get from her Son whatever she wants. There have been those moments when this simple miracle account has caused more than a few gray hairs for this minister because of Mary's role.

So, how do we good Lutherans interpret the interchange between Jesus and Mary?! Sometimes, when a Scripture passage is unclear, even baffling, we have to look to other places in the Bible to help us understand. With this particular incident that is not the case. Our answer to Mary's seemingly demand as the "mother of God" is found right here in Jesus' words: "**Dear WOMAN, why do you involve Me?!**" By that response, Jesus put Mary in her place. As He hung dying on the cross, Jesus would show tender loving care for the woman who birthed Him and raised Him – the earthly mother Who gave Him flesh. But for all intents and purposes, He must make clear that He is not under her thumb in spiritual and supernatural matters. And so, He addresses His dearly loved mother, "Dear Woman"!

Still, the complexity remains – "Why, in heaven's name, does the Holy Spirit have John who witnessed all of this that fateful day, include the exchange between Jesus and Mary at all?" The answer is in this beautiful Christian woman who (according to Luke) time and time again, ***treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart (Luke 2:19, and similar in verse 51)***. Oh, that you and I might have the faith of this Christian lady! Oh, that you and I might treasure up and ponder every sermon, every Scripture reading, every Meditation solidly based upon God's Word! Then, you and I might expect the unexpected from our Lord! Bear in mind, Jesus had performed not a single miracle to this time. He even tells Mary, ***My time has not yet come***. Still, Mary is confident!

How often haven't you and I been of "little faith?" From the Old Testament and Jesus' ministry, as well as through miracles wrought by Jesus' disciples in the early New Testament Church, we have seen Jesus' power to do miracles. Yet we have doubted. Maybe we did not even turn to God until all else had failed. May we repent and learn from this outstanding example of humble Mary, to be bold in prayer and expectations from an all-powerful, besides caring God!

A third complexity of this miracle is "Why so much wine?" Eyewitness John shares with us that there were "***six stone jars filled with water, each holding 20 to 30 gallons!***" That's a total of 120 to 180 gallons! How much did this wedding couple need, any way, for their celebration! Could they have possibly come up this short in calculated need? That's a complexity, right!? Two things to bear in mind are 1) Wine was the common meal beverage at that time; and 2) wedding banqueting and celebrating typically went on for days following the wedding. That custom contrasts sharply with the one big meal served as part of our weddings.

Still, there are those troubling words of the "master of the banquet": "***Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.***" "Houston, we have a problem!" The complexity is the question whether Jesus might be condoning over drinking. Elsewhere we find Scripture warning against drinking too much (***Proverbs 23:20 & 23:29-35***), for instance – but not against drinking alcohol in general, making this account a real challenge for our prohibitionist Christian friends! OK, but what about the underlined words above! "After the guests have had too much to drink" is going to trouble some readers. No one wants to envision Jesus at a wedding with drunken guests. Some scholars therefore try to translate those key words, "until after the guests have drunk freely." But if we take the master of banquet simply emphasizing how refreshingly different the wedding at Cana was from what USUALLY HAPPENED, then the problem disappears.

One final question – "Why this particular miracle, why now?" - and Jesus' first miracle at that? For the answer, we go back to the early verses of our text: ***Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus AND HIS DISCIPLES had also been invited.*** At this point in time, Jesus' had just called His first six disciples. Could you name them? Well, there were ***Andrew, Peter, John, James, Philip, and Nathaniel***. These disciples had to be last minute invitees. John tells that they had become disciples of Jesus only three days before! This also could explain why the generous wedding gift of so much wine provided by Jesus, not only in His own name but in the name of His disciples. Furthermore, if this couple was so open a "the more, the merrier" attitude toward adding guests – maybe this even explains why they ran out of wine in the first place!

At any rate, why this miracle, why now!? The answer is in the last verse of our text: ***This, the first of His miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed His glory, and His disciples put their trust in Him.*** Christians frequently cite this account to show how Jesus honors marriage and gives lavish gifts when they are least expected. Those are good thoughts. John, however, has told it to show how Jesus began using signs to reveal His glory. The miracle had a purpose for which the wedding was only a setting. It was a sign! A sign points to something. This sign provided a physical way to point to a spiritual truth, namely, the glory of the one and only Son of God. This act of turning water into wine proved Jesus' divine authority and majesty.

Jesus' first sign took place in the obscure village of Cana in Galilee. We might have expected Him to begin in Jerusalem. At the time, the sign was meant primarily for His disciples. Is it possible that only they, the servants, and Jesus' mother knew Jesus did it?! Ah! Another complexity for us to meditate upon! We might have expected a huge crowd of witnesses led by important dignitaries of the day. Instead, without fanfare, Jesus did what God had set before Him to do!

It worked! ***He thus revealed His glory, and His disciples put their faith in Him!*** These newly appointed, first disciples of Jesus thus had new evidence that Jesus was the promised Messiah! They saw the glory of God (1:14) through His miracle. They believed more firmly in Jesus than they had before. The disciples had already come to faith when they joined Jesus only days earlier at the direction of John the Baptist. But now began the process of building up that faith, instructing it, and confirming it.

Dear Christians, have you struggled as have I at the complexities surrounding the account of this first and in ways simplest of miracles? Are there other passages of Scripture that trouble you? Surely, the tempting devil, the mocking world, and your weak flesh would lead you to question the words you will soon hear: ***Take, drink (this wine), It is My true blood shed for you. Take, eat. This is My true body given for you into death on the cross for your sins.*** Disciple of Jesus, this is what Christian faith is all about, isn't it? Faith is seeing past all the questions and complexities that our minds put forth which could lead us to doubt and unbelief. May this Word of Christ reveal His glory to your heart and move you all the more to put your faith in Him! Amen!

May our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, Who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word! Amen