

Second Sunday after Epiphany
Grace Church of West Feliciana Parish
Saint Francisville, LA
Isaiah 62:1-5; John 2:1-11

- I can be oblivious sometimes - not noticing or picking up on the significance of things going on around me.
- And I'm particularly bad when it comes to jokes - especially when someone is being sarcastic. For some reason, sarcasm eludes me.
- When I was working at the prison, I had a guy working for me as a clerk who was really sarcastic - all the time - and it really through me off. I could never tell if he was being serious and meant what he said or if he was joking. "Really!?!...oh, no, not really. I see. That was a joke." It was bad. I eventually told him that he had to let me know somehow when he was joking - give me some kind of sign - a "thumbs up" so I'd know he meant something other than what he was saying.
- So, periodically throughout the day, he'd say something - I'd look confused - then, he'd give the thumbs up - and, "ahhh, ok...a joke. I get it"
- Sometimes signs are important, especially for the oblivious types like me, to alert us that there is a different meaning or a deeper significance to what we may perceive on the surface.
- In our gospel reading for today, what Jesus does at the wedding feast at Cana is referred to as "the first of his signs" - indicating there is a deeper significance or different meaning to what we simply perceive on the surface of the story.
- So, what's the significance of this miracle story?
 - The passage is rich with symbolism - and there are a number of different ways people have interpreted it over the years.
 - On the most basic, "plain sense" level. What Jesus does in the story shows us that he was not a "teetotaler" - he did not adhere to a total and universal prohibition of consuming alcoholic beverages.
 - The wedding feast has been going on for a while - and we can gather from the story that the guests have been drinking a fair amount. So much so that the wine is running out. This would have been a great embarrassment to the hosts of the feast - and would have likely signaled the end of the celebration. The "sign" Jesus performs gives them more - a lot more - roughly 180 gallons - or, I've seen it calculated out - about 1000 bottles. An incredible amount - a superabundance - of the finest and best wine you could imagine.
 - But there has to be more going on than just this - a deeper meaning than the "plain sense" of this miraculous event.
 - According to some early Church Fathers, the context of the miracle is what's important - that it happens during a wedding feast - and that what Jesus does is not

simply turn water into wine - but make the whole event significant - transforming it into a prefiguration of the time of messianic fulfillment -- when, as the prophets say, God will restore the fortunes of his people - and sweet wine will flow abundantly from the mountains and the hills - that this wedding feast is really meant to be a foretaste of that heavenly banquet - when God and humanity are finally and fully united - as a bridegroom with his bride.

- This interpretation would certainly fit with our first reading for today, from the prophet Isaiah - "For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you"
- Now, these different interpretations are certainly possible - and warranted by the text - but I also think there is something else going on in the readings for us today -
- See, the thing about signs is - you not only have to know how to interpret them - you first have to know that they're there - that what you're perceiving is, in fact, a sign - requiring interpretation - that there is, in fact, a deeper or different meaning beyond the "surface" of what you're looking at.
- As one commentator puts it - Jesus' miracles are never simply naked displays of power, still less neat conjuring tricks to impress the masses, but *signs, significant* displays of power that point beyond themselves to the deeper realities that could be perceived with the eyes of faith.
- If we go back and really look at what is going on in this story - I wonder - how many people at the wedding feast would have received the wine as a sign of a deeper reality?
- How many would have suspected that there is something special about this wine (aside from the fact that it tastes really good)?
- Most the guests had been drinking for a while anyway. They probably would not have been aware - or paying attention - to where the wine came from. A servant hands them a glass and I imagine their reaction might - "oh, good, more wine - I thought they had run out - oh wow, this wine is awesome!" How many would stop to inquire after its source? How many would take the time to investigate if there were a different and deeper significance to what they were given?
- The text actually makes a point of saying that the steward did not know where the wine had come from - which is why he makes the comment to the bridegroom that everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior after the guests have become drunk, but you've saved the good wine until now.
 - I imagine the bridegroom would have been just as dumbfounded - not knowing where the wine came from or how to respond to the steward's comment. "I did? I don't remember saving the best wine for last...huh"
- Perhaps only those few servants - who drew the wine from the water jars - would have know that something miraculous had happened - but did they grasp the deeper meaning of the "sign"?

- The disciples may have been the only ones to perceive the deeper significance - viewing it through the eyes of faith, receiving it as a revelation of Jesus's glory, showing who he is - and they respond by putting their faith in him - they believed in him.
- We the readers - have the benefit of perspective - We know - since we are told a chapter earlier - that this Jesus is the one through whom all things were made - "all things came into being through him, and without him not one thing has come into being."
- This is God, meeting us in the flesh, who has come as one of us - to share his life with us - to show us the Father in his glory.
- The deeper meaning of this story for us today is not so much about alcohol - or wedding feasts - but about who Jesus is - the one responsible for this transformation of water into wine. But, *that* meaning is not limited to just this event - a miracle performed thousands of years ago in a far away land.
- Rather, I believe, this story is meant for us - today - as a kind of "thumbs up" - to alert us to look for something more in the everyday world around us.
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- Many of us have been reading CS Lewis in our Adult Formation series. According to Lewis, the "miracle" in this story is really just a condensation - a quicker and more pronounced example of what God has always been doing - which we oft fail to notice. Lewis writes:
 - *God creates the vine and teaches it to draw up water by its roots and, with the aid of the sun, to turn that water into a juice which will ferment and take on certain qualities. Thus every year, from Noah's time till ours, God turns water into wine. That, men fail to see.*
- In other words - Lewis is saying that God has created everything - the grape vine, the soil, the sun and the rains - and from the water from the sky - sucked into the vine - to the fruit that ferments - God is the one ultimately responsible for the transformation of water into wine. But, Lewis notes - humans are too often oblivious to this - and fail to recognize God as the source.
 - *Either like the Pagans they refer the process to some finite spirit, Bacchus or Dionysus: or else, like the moderns, they attribute real and ultimate causality to the chemical and other material phenomena which are all that our senses can discover in it. But when Christ at Cana makes water into wine, the mask is off' (John 5:19).*
- As I mentioned before, the "sign" displays Jesus' glory - and reveals who he is - his divine identity. Lewis, however, goes on to say that:
 - *The miracle has only half its effect if it only convinces us that Christ is God: it will have its full effect if whenever we see a vineyard or drink a glass of wine we remember that here works He who sat at the wedding party in Cana.*
- We will truly grasp the deeper meaning of the sign - not simply when we recognize that in Jesus we meet God - but when - in the vineyard or in our next glass of wine we

realize that here too God is at work - this also we receive because of him - here works He who sat at the wedding party in Cana turning water into wine.

- Jesus is revealing a deeper truth about his Father, a truth we often forget or take for granted. The simple truth that God's grace is extravagantly generous. God's grace is truly amazing and overflowing. We are surrounded by God's grace every single day. Every breath we take is a gift from the Lord. Every relationship we enter into is a blessing from the Lord. Each shows forth his glory.
- And, we know, Christ's glory is most fully revealed and made manifest on the cross - his death - resurrection and ascension - In his coming into the world to free us from the bonds of sin and death - to open our eyes to the abundant mercies and grace and blessings that God has provided for us - that surrounded us everyday - of which we are so often oblivious.
- To see his glory here today we must be willing to open our eyes - to take the time to seek for something deeper - something more. And we must be willing to become the type of people he wants us to become - to become his disciples - like those in the story - who respond to him with faith - who believe in him.
- Faith is more than intellectual assent. Faith requires commitment - a different way of being in the world - a different way of life.
- When we open our eyes to see his glory, we become transformed people - changed as the water into wine - by the power of the Holy Spirit acting in us.
- And we go forth - called to be witnesses in the world to the transforming power God's grace - of his love and mercy - of his blessings that surround us everyday - the gifts we receive from his hand.
- We are to be the "thumbs up" that alerts others to the glory of his work displayed all around us in the world - of which we are so often oblivious - we are called to "signs" that point beyond ourselves - beyond the "surface level" of what we perceive - to the deeper reality and still greater truth of God's love for us - most clearly seen in the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ - who gave himself for us, and for our salvation.
- As we prayed in the collect for today: may we be illumined by God's word and Sacraments - so that we may shine with the radiance of Christ's glory, that he may be known, worshipped, and obeyed to the ends of the earth. Amen.