

## **When the Kingdom Comes to the Kitchen**

John 2:1-11

The Second Sunday After the Epiphany/ Year C

January 17, 2010

**O Lord, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. AMEN.**

Everyone loves a good party. There is something about them which can make even the most sour among us smile. Maybe its the gleeful children stuffing cake into their mouths, the sugary icing smearing across their lips, or the bright balloons whose ascent into heaven is only prevented by colored string. Perhaps its the silly games: the hokey-pokey or the pin the tail on the donkey which tickles our funny bones. Maybe its simply being with other people whose joy is contagious. Parties come in all shapes and sizes. They can be as simple as a few gathered family members around a birthday cake or as elaborate as a feast fit for a king. They can involve simple jingles sung with gusto by off-key voices or magnificent anthems played by hired orchestras. Whatever shape they take, parties are celebrations of life and community. They seem to sprout up around all those events which make life so precious: birth, death, remembrances, national celebrations. Our Hebrew forefathers and foremothers were not strangers to the party. They knew how to strum a tune on their lyres and beat their animal-skin drums with the best of them. Every time one turns around they are shaking their timbrels with joy. Life is good and life is gift, a lesson which we sometimes forget. Sometime we may even need a party to remind us.

The tiny village of Cana, nestled on the rolling hills and pastureland, nine miles north of Nazareth is as unassuming a settlement as they come. When the morning sun peeks her brilliant face above the horizon, she, more often than not, finds the villagers already out of bed. In rural Galilee, the days begin early. Walking down the village street in the crisp morning light, one can easily find the men kicking and cursing at their sheep, prodding them toward the pastures while others open their small shops for business. The smell of wood shavings from the carpenter on the corner mixes with the yeasty odor of bread dough from the bakery down the street. Throughout the day the women would tend the children and then weave in the late afternoon heat. As the sun sets and the evening lamps are lighted, the people will gather in their homes for an early dinner and an early bedtime. Day in and day out, the pattern rarely changes. The people of Cana live a simple existence in tune with the daily rhythms of life. Life in this village is no different from life in any other village. But on this particular day, the normal flow of life is about to be interrupted, punctuated by a joyous festival, a wedding. Little did the villagers realize, that their small-town wedding is about to become the epicenter of something much greater than they dare imagine.

Whether in modern America or ancient Palestine, a wedding is a sight to behold. Friends and family gather from miles around, carrying both their gifts and best wishes which they lovingly bestow on the blushing bride and nervous groom. Among the throng of guests who make their way up the road to Cana are an older woman, her age just beginning to show and the woman's Son, a man known as Jesus of Nazareth. Mary and

Jesus stand along the edge of the street watching the festivities. They have been invited to the party along with Jesus' rag-tag bunch of followers. Strangely, the gospel of John does not seem terribly concerned about who invited them or even for whom the wedding festivities are being held. Whether the mother, her son and her son's friends sat on the bride or the groom's side we do not know. The gospel of John simply doesn't care, the bride and the groom are incidental to the action about to unfold.

The pomp and circumstance of the wedding surrounds Jesus and family. As dusk begins to settle over the village, the groom accompanied by his torch bearing attendants, processes through the street to the well-lit home of the bride. As is custom, the bride is surrounded by her attendants who carry about small clay oil lamps and swing small vials of extra oil on cords from their fingers. Perhaps, it is this "wedding in Cana" that later provides fodder for Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish virgins who run out of oil. Whatever the case, the gathering of friends and neighbors waits in anticipation for the groom's knock on the bride's door. As he does so, he yells out "May I see her"? She appears in an elaborately embroidered dress, a veil covering her face. The groom lifts the veil and cries out: "What a treasure I have found". The crowd takes their cue and everyone yells in joy. Now the real party begins. The bride and groom and all their guest return to the groom's house for the wedding feast.

The preparations for the banquet must have taken days if not months. No expense has been spared. Every food imaginable, from tastily seasoned fish to honey cakes, is spread before us. There are shanks of sheep and roast calf, fine cheeses and of course wine. We should not assume that wine flows freely and is consumed everywhere in the lands of the Bible. Wine, like olive oil, is the cash crop. Many a poor villager is busy in its production, but drinks of it sparingly. The exceptions are, of course, family celebrations, in particular weddings. There, wine flows freely. Even if the family has to scrimp and save to do it. A wedding simply can not be carried off in style without wine. And here is the difficulty within this morning's gospel. While the guests and the newlyweds are having a wonderful time. Their music, dancing and laughter echoing about the hall. There are others present who are unable to muster even a chuckle. The poor caterers are absolutely mortified. Midway through the feast, they realize that the wine is gone. And it is far too late in the day to go to one of the local vineyards and procure more. What can they do? It is then that they notice the kind face of one of the party guests. She is an older woman, who just by chance has been hanging around the kitchen door. Why the mother of our Lord is not out dancing or talking to the other women is anyone guess. Instead, she is here bearing witness to the caterers misery. Mary, never one to let anything slide, decides in an instant to tackle the "wine problem" herself. And she know just the person to take care of it- Her Son. She makes her way quickly across the room to where Jesus is laughing with his followers and displaying the same boldness she had in questioning that bedside angel so many year earlier exclaims: "They're just about out of wine." There is enough of an implied suggestion in her statement that Jesus picks it up rather quickly much as sons tend to due from their mothers. He replies "Is that any of our business, Mother- yours or mine? This isn't my time. Don't push me." Mary simply smiles the same smile she wore the night she gave birth and walks back to kitchen. She shouts in to the servants "Whatever he tells you, do

it?” The Mary of John’s gospel is certainly not meek and mild. In fact, she appears to be rather presumptuous. Roman Catholic interpreters see this scripture as evidence of Mary’s power to mediate with Christ. Protestants, on the other hand, tend to see her as uncomprehendingly pushy and needing a good rebuke. Perhaps, there is another way of seeing Mary’s actions. Like any good parent, she knows that sometimes children need a little push to get things going. At any rate, her statement far from being presumptuous, demonstrates an incredible degree of faith. She is confident that Christ will do something! And even if he doesn’t, Mary’s words are out there. An invitation of sorts, inviting us in the end to “do” whatever her Son tells us.

Far from being angry or irritated, Jesus does decide to take action. He makes his way over to the kitchen where Mary is undoubtedly already standing. He tells the caterers to fill six large stone water pots with water. Jesus’ order strikes the kitchen staff as odd since these water pots were used just hours earlier to wash the grime, dirt and sweat off the feet of guests. What do these dirty sinks have to do with their wine difficulties? The oddness of the situation becomes down right bizarre and potential offensive when Jesus instructs the servants to ladle out some of the water and take it to the party’s host. They do so, though probably not without a little reluctance. They watch with trepidation as the host takes a swig from the pitcher. They wait for him to spit out the tepid feet-smelling water, but instead the host looks up and with bright eyes salutes the groom for saving the best wine until last. And with this salutation the miracle is accomplished. John’s gospel simply tells us that these events in Cana of Galilee are the first sign that Jesus gives to us, the first glimpse of his glory. Strangely, it is a glory which is not glimpsed by all. Only the servants, the kitchen staff, a few followers and an elderly mother know the source of this new wine. If we thought this miracle was going to be a public spectacle we are sadly mistaken. There is no healing in a crowd, no feeding of thousands during a hillside sermon, no raising of dead men. Jesus simply turns water into wine in the kitchen of an out-of-the-way house in an out-of-the-way village with no one the wiser except for a few followers and some servants. For them it becomes a moment of belief, a moment in which they are confronted by something quite new in their midst- new wine literally but even more wondrously a new reality, a new age, a new kingdom.

The gospel ends today with the disciples and Mary leaving the wedding, traveling the road to nearby Capernaum where they stay for three days. Their lives bear witness to transformation, yet existence goes on as before. This troubles us. How could they simply go about their lives knowing what they know, having seen what they have seen. How could they resume the company of old friends while remaining in the friendship of this one who can turn water into wine? In many ways, we already know. Living as a Christian, believing in Jesus as the Christ is to live a life within a life. Nothing is changed and yet everything is changed. When we invite Christ into our lives, into those places where we don’t always want others to see, we discover that the hidden waters of our life are in fact wine. Word has become flesh. An hour that has yet to be is here. Our lives, our very existence, therefore, is an existence lived at the edge of the ages. We live at that point where the old eon and the new dance a minuet. What will be is! What seems to be is no more? In this Word, in this Light of God who becomes man, all is new.

And that is precisely what Saint John is getting at in his gospel, what Jesus, himself, is pointing to. He brings the last age. He ushers in the kingdom and places it squarely in the middle of our lives, allowing it to ferment in all those unseen places. He places in us those sparks which will allow the pallid water of who we are to become fiery red wine.

This January, the year, once again, is new. On the Jordan's banks, a befouled river becomes a baptismal font. A believer drinks from the cup of the new covenant and says: "It is the Lord". To believe is to know that the old order has passed away and the new has come. Do we believe this? Do we believe that the one who makes all thing new has arrived. Do we believe that he is here, in our worship, in our bread and wine, in our halls of celebration, in our lives. Most importantly, do we believe that he is present in those places where we can't even see him, lurking in our kitchen's shadows so to speak. Belief entails a "who" rather than a "what." Believing is our own action of entering into Jesus' saving work. Our own encounters with Jesus, through prayer, through our engagement with others, through our own struggle to die daily to ourselves, are therefore true epiphanies of God's glory. Such epiphanies invite us to respond to the divine presence through action. In responding to other people, in answering cries for help or the lonely person's plea for companionship, in bearing witness to the laughter of delight echoing from the lips of those enraptured by God's beauty. In recognizing others as revelations of God, we can better recognize ourselves as revelations, as signs of God's in breaking kingdom, as epiphanies for others. We ourselves are the good wine kept until after Jesus' ascension. Our calling is to take up the task of Jesus' disciples. There is new wine among us, this day. There is a marriage between heaven and earth, between divinity and humanity, between God and us. Let us be signs to the world which always point to our savior. Let us reflect, this day, through our living how obedience leads to glory, how dying leads to rising, how believing leads to abundant and intoxicating life.