

“IT’S NOT ABOUT THE WEDDING!”

A Sermon for the Second Sunday after Epiphany, January 17, 2016

Text: John 2:1-11

This is not a story about wine; or a wedding; or marriage.

This is a story about life; it is a story about Jesus; it is a story about Jesus, the life of the world.

“In him was life,” John asserts in chapter one. In Jesus was life, and the life was the light of all people. What a profound claim!

According to John, most people did not accept that claim; they did not see Jesus for who he was. “He came to his own, and his own received him not.” On the other hand, some people *did* recognize him and believe in him, and to those “he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.”

That is a powerful but abstract thesis statement for the whole gospel of John. After that come stories which illuminate the meaning of the thesis claim.

The story of Jesus and his disciples attending a wedding at Cana in Galilee is a popular text for wedding sermons and wedding intercessory prayers. The reasoning is something like this: By attending some people’s wedding one time and even more by extending the celebration with extra wine, Jesus was putting his stamp of approval on “weddings.”

But that is a little like saying that Jesus restored the eyesight of people in order to express God’s approval of ophthalmology; or made the lame walk in order to endorse hiking.

No, John wants us to find something deeper in the story, because he has put a deeper meaning in the story. He wants us to see something about Jesus, something about life, and something about the connection between the two. That is why it is placed as the first story about Jesus displaying his power, at the very beginning of his ministry. “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”

This story about a wedding is actually about life. The whole of life. Life with a capital L. The life *you* have. Yes, *you*. This story is about your world, and the life all people lead in that world.

Life ought to be better than it is. You know that. Your life is not so great that you don’t think frequently about what is wrong with it. The things you have, the experiences you go through, the relationships you have, your prospects—all of it could be better. And that is what this story is about. It is not a story about Cana, it is about greater Indianapolis, and the life that goes on here. It’s about what we read in the papers, what we gossip about, what we see on billboards and on the sidewalks. That life. That is what this story is about. It’s not as good as it ought to be. In fact, sometimes, it is rather bad. Globally and locally, from the universe right down to your body, life is not as we think it should be. Things happen, and we grow frustrated.

“Frustrated” is a good word for the situation into which Jesus stepped in Cana. Maybe because it comes from the Latin word for “empty.” The people were frustrated. They knew they were at a party. They were there to congratulate the couple who were getting married. To recognize

their relationship and to share their happiness. The wedding banquet was supposed to be a high-water moment socially and emotionally. “Things are going great!” was the theme of the banquet. “Onward with life!” was the sentiment. Glasses were raised, people danced, hostilities among neighbors were suspended, and joy abounded.

But, at the moment Jesus entered, they were frustrated. People were feeling let down. Glasses were empty, and that meant soon they would have to return to the problems of life. They would pick up where they had left off, and go back to their grumbling and the scarcity of the life of the colonized.

Along came Jesus. The party became a party once again.

John wants us to know and believe that the effect of Jesus on our deflated lives is analogous to the effect of a fresh and abundant supply of excellent wine on a party that has become no fun.

Just as he wants us to know and believe that the effect of Jesus on our confused lives is analogous to the effect on a blind person of being given their eyesight.

And just as John wants us to see that the effect of Jesus on people who are faint is like that of a good clean water supply on a person who is parched. Or the effect of food on the hungry. Strength given back to the legs of a lame person.

But I suspect John prefers this image best—the party revived—because he places it first among the signs of Jesus which reveal his glory so that people believe in him.

It’s not about the wedding, it’s about life.

Life is not life, according to Jesus, which is lived in bondage to sin, to the past, to obligation, to nation, to oppressors. Life is not life which is not free. “If you abide in me you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” Life is not life which is not in union with God. “There will be one flock, one shepherd.” Life is not life, which focuses on self, or on what we do not have, or on danger, or on what others have done to us.

Life *is* life, on the other hand, which is lived as a child of God in communion with God’s other children, as we delight in one another, serve one another, love one another, and listen to the voice of the shepherd. “I have come that you may have life, and have it abundantly.”

You’ve heard the song “Life is a cabaret, old chum”—well, John is saying that Jesus is saying something like that. Except Jesus is not merely endorsing “party” as the way to live. The story makes a clear distinction--the same distinction John makes throughout his gospel.

The distinction is between life which is animated solely by the law of God, and life which is animated by the spirit of Christ. Remember, John said “The law indeed came through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

The alternative spirit Jesus offered to the people of Cana and the rest of Galilee and the world, was a life animated by a spirit which would replace life driven by goals and criticism and complaining and rivalry and contention and, ultimately, mutual self-destruction. In its place, Jesus offered a life animated by a spirit of forgiveness and peace and love.

The distinction between the flat party and the bubbly party of Jesus, is the same distinction as that in John 8, between the men who wanted to stone a woman caught in adultery and the one man who forgave her, giving her life back to her.

That spirit is available to us through Christ, how? Simply by abiding in his words, receiving his own body and blood, remembering what he has done for us, and allowing him to breathe and re-breathe his Holy Spirit into us.

That is what we are up to this morning, and every time we gather for worship. This we do in remembrance of him, so that the world may have new life. Amen.

