

WHAT A DIFFERENCE JESUS MAKES!
Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany
January 28, 31; February 1
St. Mark's Lutheran Church, Watertown, WI
Pastor Bill Heiges

May God's grace and love fill yours hearts and your homes with his abundant peace in Christ. Amen.

The Word of our Lord which I will share with you today is the Gospel lesson in **John 2:1-11** – the first miracle Jesus performed.

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there,

and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside

And said, "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."

This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

This is the Word of our Lord.

In Jesus Christ, who wants to be a permanent guest in our hearts, in our homes and our lives, my dear friends.

A teacher asked his Sunday School class, "What's a miracle?" The little girl shot her hand up and replied, "It's something we can't do, but Jesus can." Miracles bring us into the realm of the extraordinary. They are not everyday events. This reading in John 2:1-11 records the first miracle we witness Jesus performing; and the point of the miracle was that Jesus revealed His glory, and the disciples put their faith in Him.

Jesus was in the business of changing and transforming lives. Everyone with whom He came into contact came had an encounter with God in the flesh – “God in man made manifest”, as we just sang. People like Zacchaeus, about whom we just heard in the Gospel lesson, had their life totally turned around by their encounter with God’s grace in Christ. That encounter with Jesus resulted in his salvation. Everywhere Jesus went, people’s lives were changed. The sick were made well. Those who were crippled were made whole. The blind received sight, and the deaf were made to hear. The lame were made to walk; and even the dead were brought back to life. All of those people would be able to stand in front of you and me today and tell us what a difference Jesus makes.

And that’s what I’d like us to focus on today: *“What a Difference Jesus Makes!”* 1) when you invite Him into your home and life; 2) when you go to Him for help; and 3) when you put your faith in Him. The setting for this miracle took place very early in Jesus’ ministry. John the Baptist had pointed to Jesus and told His disciples, “Look there is the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world.” And from that time on, some of John’s disciples began to follow Jesus.

1. Early on, at the start of his earthly ministry Jesus and these disciples were invited to a wedding in Cana, a wedding in which Mary, the mother of our Lord, played a very prominent roll. Perhaps they were relatives – we are not sure; but I found it interesting that God chose a wedding for Jesus’ first recorded miracle; a wedding where he would he would first reveal His glory giving us a glimpse of who He really was.

You see, a wedding is a celebration of marriage; and marriage gives us a picture in the Bible of the intimate relationship God wants to have with us, his church. In the Old Testament book of Isaiah 62:5b, it says **as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.** That picture of marriage is the imagery that the Apostle Paul used when he wrote to describe the relationship between the church – the bride – and Jesus Christ as the groom in Ephesians chapter 5. And in the book of Revelation, we are told that at the second coming of Christ it will be like a bridegroom coming for his bride, the church; and they will enjoy an endless feast [similar to a wedding banquet] forever.

Weddings for you and me are very happy and joyous occasions. They’re big events – with a lot of money, lot of time, lot of expense and effort put into it – that last an entire day. Well, for Jews it lasted a whole week. Can you imagine footing that bill! (I’m glad I only have two daughters.) On a Wednesday night, if you were a maiden, [Thursday night if you were a widow] the bridegroom would come for his bride; and they would lead them in festal parade to the bridegroom’s home, and the ceremony would take place, and there would be a feast and a celebration that would last for an entire week. Food would be prepared and wine would be present for all of the guests there.

You know, we invite Christ to our weddings. We want to use a beautiful place like this (church) as the setting for our weddings, but I wonder how many of us invite Christ into our marriage, and into our home after the wedding? Those who do would be able to tell you what a difference Jesus makes.

What a difference Jesus makes when we make Him a regular part of our marriage! Do you know that husbands and wives that take the time to pray together and read the Bible together and have devotions (it takes just a few minutes each day) and come to church on a weekly basis – do you realize that they have less than a one percent divorce rate? Less than 1 in 1,189 ever break up! When Christ is the head of every home and the unseen guest at every meal; when he is present for every decision in those homes, you will find marriages that are happier and healthier. You will find marriages that last a lifetime. You will find homes that are full of peace – not trouble free, because trouble comes into everyone’s life. Even Jesus said, **“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”** (John 16:33b). And because Christ is present with them, they have the means and the power to face those troubles and difficulties when they come, and the wisdom to handle them with God’s grace and his strength. You will find children that are also far more secure and will perform better in school and function better later in life in those homes that make Christ the head and bring Him into every aspect of daily life. That’s exactly what Jesus wants. That is the difference he makes.

He came to a home, a humble home in the little village of Cana. That’s where this wedding took place; and He brought with Him His joy. Just imagine what would have happened to this couple if Jesus had not come. When they ran out of wine – well, in the Old Testament they believed that when you ran out of wine, you have lost your joy. And Jesus brought so much into that couple’s life as they started out. Jesus had said **“I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.”** (John 15:11).

There are so many people like Zacchaeus who were without God and without hope in this life. And you remember Jesus stopped just short of that sycamore fig tree, looked up, and said, **“Zacchaeus, I must stay at your house today.”** (Luke 19:5b). Why? So that He could bring salvation to that man’s house and to that man’s life. That’s exactly what happened when Jesus came to Zaccheus’ home.

Can you vividly picture the peace and the joy, the power and the love that God wants to bring into your home and into your life? You will receive just what Zacchaeus received – God’s unconditional love. You will receive grace that covers over all of your sins and erases all of your guilt, that gives you a chance to start over. It doesn’t matter what the condition of your marriage is right now, it doesn’t matter what the condition of your home was. Right now you are bringing Christ in – you are bringing the power of God himself into your life and into your marriage and into your home. You will receive incredible unlimited grace and kindness and love and peace. All of this happens when you invite Christ into your home.

2. What a difference Jesus makes when you go to Him for help. They had a problem here at this wedding. They ran out of wine. And we don’t know exactly the role that Mary, the mother of our Lord, was playing, but she came to Jesus and said to Him, **“They have no more wine.”** Now we may not think that’s such a big deal, but it was a major crisis for them. It would have been a huge embarrassment to the host. They would have broken one of those unwritten laws of hospitality back then: that you invite all of these guests, the whole town, to your home for this wedding celebration that lasted a week, and you would provide the food and enough wine to cover them all.

Well, you notice the very first thing Mary did was go to Jesus. She didn't treat Him as a last resort. I wonder how often you and I do that. We treat God as the last resort when we face trouble. We try to exhaust all of our human abilities and all of our answers. Then when we run out of answers and run out of solutions, that's when we go to God. But not Mary – she went straight to Jesus first. We sometimes think, “well, I don't want to bother God. My problem is not really all that big, and God has more important things to do than to take care of this”.

It's like those people that come to me – and this is one of my pet peeves, so if this is true of you, this is your public rebuke – and say, “Pastor, I know how busy you are, and I don't want to take up your time, and I know you have so many things to do...” And I stop them right there and say, “Whoa, whoa, wait a minute here. You forget. You are my ministry. You're the reason I'm here. I can always go back to this stupid computer later.” (I want to get away from it anyway.) There is no problem in your life that is too small and too insignificant that I can't take the time to help you with.

There is no problem in your life that is too small and too insignificant that God does not care about. You matter to him. He cares about you, and he invites you to come to him – not just in times of trouble so he can deliver you, but with every problem, every decision, every choice that you are confronted with, and every dilemma that comes across your doorstep. God wants you to know he cares.

Well, when Mary came to Him with this problem, **they have no more wine**, His response seems almost aloof, right? **“Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come.”** His time has not yet come, he said. Did you ever wonder what that meant? Jesus would repeat that several times throughout His ministry: **“My hour has not yet come.”** He said, “The Father has set the time and the hour for me.” Well, that time and that hour would be the time in which Jesus would be glorified by the Father and bring glory to the Father. We have a glimpse into the glory that is Jesus' as the Son of God in the changing of water into wine in this miracle, but it will be eclipsed by the greatest miracle of all when His time comes, and that took place when Christ was on the cross. That was the greatest miracle in which God took and transferred the sins of the world and laid them on Jesus. A whole lifetime of my sins and guilt and your sin and guilt taken off of us and placed on his Son – that was when Jesus brought His father glory, that was His time.

3. But He did answer her in this time of need. You know, Jesus came and answered her, maybe not necessarily in the way that she thought. She didn't know how Jesus would answer this dilemma. She just simply trusted that He would. And our God is like that. He doesn't always answer our problems in the way we think is best, but in the way he knows is best for us. He doesn't always answer them in the time that we think he should, but in the time that he knows is just right. That's why the Bible says that his ways are not our ways; his thoughts are not our thoughts – they are higher than our ways and higher than our thoughts. We simply put our trust in him.

And how did Jesus respond? Well, He told those servants to fill those big, large water jars that hold thirty gallons each – six of them – one hundred eighty gallons. And He didn't make Boones Farm, did He? No, He made choice, fine wine that even amazed the wedding host, the master of

the banquet. He brought the best. Isn't that just like our God! We come to him with our need, and he overwhelms us with his power. We come to him with our sin, and he overwhelms us with his grace, because his grace is greater than all of our sin. His power is more than enough in our life. That's so like our God. We come to him guilty; we leave forgiven. We come to him dying; we leave alive. We come to him hurting; we leave whole.

That's what our God does. He is able to do immeasurably more than anything we could ever ask or imagine. Zacchaeus found that out; the Apostle Paul found that out. An endless parade of people whose lives were dramatically changed by Jesus knew what a difference Jesus makes when you go to Him for help. In Romans 3:32 it says, **He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?** If He went to the cross for you and me, He has power to spare to graciously give you whatever it is you need. You need peace, you need hope, you need help in your marriage, you need help with a child, you're looking for a job, or are you out of money? Are you saying to the Lord, "Lord, I'm out of wine; I'm out of hope, I'm out of joy, I'm out of answers. Can you help me?" And God comes with his lavishness. **How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!** (1John 3:1)

Oh, what a difference Jesus makes when we put our faith in Him like Mary did. She didn't understand how He would answer, but she expected Jesus to do something. She knew there was something different about Jesus, and the result of this miracle is that Jesus thus revealed His glory, and His disciples put their faith in Him. They got a brief glimpse into who Jesus really, truly was. This was God entered into their life in human form!

We are told in John 3:2, that Nicodemus, one of the teaching rabbis of the Jews, said "**Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.**" He knew there was something different and something special about Jesus. The miracles point to who Jesus is and to what He came to do. The Apostle John, who wrote this Gospel, would give the reason why he wrote it at the end of this Gospel. He said **Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.** (John 21:30, 31). That's what Jesus came for: that we might have life and have it more abundantly.

What a difference Jesus makes in our life, my friends, with the peace and the hope and the joy and the love and the power and the grace that He wants to bring into our everyday life! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall guard and keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.