

## January 17 2016 Year C Second Sunday after Epiphany

### Scripture Lessons ~

*Psalm 36*

*Isaiah 62:1-5*

*John 2:1-11*

### **Sermon**      *A Near – Dry Wedding*

When I first started pastoring in a place called Annville in Lebanon County in Pennsylvania about 25 years ago, it is hard to believe that now, the near-by town of Cleona was what then was called a quote, unquote, “dry” town; that is no one was allowed to have a license to sell or serve alcohol. Now the Cleona Fire Company had a bright idea that they would make a lot of money selling drinks at their event if the town, quote, unquote became a “wet” town. So they went through the process of getting the measure on the ballot to change the law. In fact because of that possible change, I was having a wedding fairly close to that time with a reception at the newly “wet” Cleona Fire Hall just because of that change they thought would occur. Little did everybody consider what a stir that would cause; especially for the WCTU, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union which was a Christian organization with really good intentions, founded in the 19th century to regulate the use of alcohol especially in that day so that women would not be victims of alcohol related domestic violence and economic ruin. Now if I am not mistaken, they were even a driving force behind the Prohibition period in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as well. Who would have ever thought that in 1980 that Cleona, Pennsylvania would be under the influence of this thought to be defund 19<sup>th</sup> century organization; but this group rallied their troops and made sure that Cleona’s ballot failed miserably. And as far as I know Cleona is still a dry town to this very day.

Now unlike that almost reception at the Cleona Firehouse after the wedding I was going to do, the weddings in Palestine in Jesus’ day were not generally “dry” affairs at all. Wine was a staple and a safe drink in Jesus’ day, in fact, a wedding at that time was generally known for its several days of eating and drinking. All at the expense of the groom’s family, not the bride’s family.

So what in the world is the significance in John’s Gospel teaching about a story of a nearly “dry” wedding in Canaan of Galilee; which was Jesus very first miracle?

I suppose I could say to all of you, teetotalers out there that even Jesus sanctioned drinking of wine. But I don’t think that was the point of the story.

Or I could emphasize, what I would call the Eucharistic goal of the full communion angle. Thinking about the common objects like bread and wine which

become for us a kind of spiritual food and where the water turned to wine in this story; that sounds good but I am not going to go there today.

Or I could take a look at Jesus' rather complicate interchange between his mother in the story and the whole idea if he was truly ready to assume himself fully to the larger world; especially at this wedding feast but I think I am going to save that for another time as well.

So today I want to focus on couple of other aspects of this first miracle of John's Gospel which John, in fact claims was the first of all Jesus' miracles in all of his ministry after his baptism and after his temptations in the wilderness.

The first thing I would point out to sometimes straight-laced Protestants is just that, of all the really important healings; feedings and raising from the dead; in casting out of demons and miracles that Jesus performed in the Gospels, the very first miracle that John shows us in his gospel is one that we might consider to be quite frivolous and quite unimportant-- wine running out at a wedding party. I wonder what it has to say about our faith as followers of Jesus.

First it says a number of things about who Jesus was and the kind of Christian that Jesus wants each one of us to become. What a joyful event that Jesus would be a part of but a wedding and what greater evidence of the fact that Jesus was instead of being a sort of sad sack, sad kills joy; he must have been the kind of person that was joyful, affirming; a person who would be invited to such an important event in the life of a family. So I think we are called to be the same; be joyful, be loving; be affirming; be hopeful and to be the kind of Christian that people would like to be around. The kind of people that others might, in fact, be drawn to when they have questions or problems or struggles in the midst of life.

And secondly, the problem that Jesus helped to remedy may not have been such a frivolous thing that we might suppose. The groom's family was responsible for the feast and the wine and if it gave out; what a social disaster that would have been; what a losing of face in the community; what a shame for the joyful, joyful occasion in the life of that couple. It speaks to me of the kind of person that Jesus was and that he calls each one of us to become as his followers, helpful, concern, attentive to details; willing to go out on the limb to maintain the joyful nature of such an important occasion; to help a fellow human being in time of need; not frivolous but with a kind strategy to be able to put his energy and his reputation on the line as opposed to those who might criticize; who were downer, sour puss, not willing to even share a glass of wine ; let alone their whole reputation as Jesus did in that situation.

And so what about the nature of the miracle of itself, I think I think, that is the icing on the cake of this story. The statement made about the wine by the steward of the wedding, which Joan read for us earlier, I think reminds us of the quality of the miracle that Jesus performed that day. The quality that our spiritual walk with

Jesus can take on joy, hope, forgiveness, love; the spiritual fruit that we bear each day as we try to live out our Christian life.

When presented with a sample of the water turned to wine to taste before serving the guests; what was the steward's remark, "Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine after the guests become drunk but you have saved the best wine until right now. It is a funny statement I think but I think it is a truthful statement. It is also a reflection of the kind of life we are to live in Jesus and the kind of life that God's wants for us walk in our journey of faith day by day; the quality life; the best life that God can offer. God offers us the best in Jesus and we in turn we can offer the best as well; we offer generously, we offer joy, we offer mercy, we offer kindness we offer hope and when all is said and done we tie up the package and by offering people our love. That is what I want to offer and I hope that is something that you can take home with you as well. And together we say AMEN.