

**St. John's Episcopal Church**  
Jackson, Wyoming  
Sermon for January 17, 2016 ~ Epiphany 2C  
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At the first-century Jewish wedding, the groom was the center of attention. The groom's parents, not the bride's, were responsible for the wedding festivities. The groom and his companions would go to fetch the bride by surprise and bring her to his family's home where the religious ceremony would be held. After a time, the wedding feast would commence. It was a matter of great honor and significance for everything to go smoothly and for all the guests to be treated to a superabundance of food and beverage. Imagine the chagrin of the groom and his family if suddenly the wine gave out before the feast was over. It is at this point of impending embarrassment and imminent social disaster that Jesus and his mother enter the scene.

This miracle at Cana, recorded only by John, comes at the wrong time in so many ways: it took place "on the third day," an unmistakable pointer to the resurrection of Jesus. The village wedding feast is a foretaste of the "marriage supper of the Lamb" at the end of the age. It comes at the *beginning* of the Gospel of John. It isn't attached to any long discourse of Jesus as are the other signs in John's gospel. Jesus himself complains that it is the wrong time. Yet he responds to the immediate need of the community and creates wine, the best wine, in abundant quantities. Plenty of wine at a first century Jewish wedding is a necessary element because from the time of Moses, wine is the symbol of life-blood; it is blessing. A wedding with no wine is not a wedding. But they ran out. It's a disaster. Not an earthquake, tornado, tsunami, epidemic, famine, or avalanche, but nevertheless, a disaster. Jesus enters into their need and blessings flow in abundance. Our brothers and sisters in various places where disaster has arrived need this wine. And so do we.

**This is a story about the transformation that happens when Jesus enters the story of our lives.**

*When Jesus enters the story, there is redemption.* As John seems to imply by putting this story at the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, Jesus came to restore the joy that has gone out of life.

I'll always remember visiting Port au Prince, Haiti and worshipping in Holy Trinity Episcopal Cathedral. Up in the ceiling, in brilliant color and in the Haitian primitive style is a depiction of the Miracle at Cana. The artist has added all sorts of elements from Haitian daily life, such as a man who has evidently just stolen a chicken running through the outdoor wedding ceremony and being pursued by a constable. The priest, the bride and groom, seem unperturbed by all the commotion going on around them. Over to the side, under the trees, a feast is waiting. The ordinary is transformed into something festive. That mural and the Cathedral were destroyed six years ago. But the message that endured long enough for the Cathedral to be built and the mural to be painted will endure that tragedy and be an inspiration for generations yet unborn.

I've been to the Galilean village of Cana. Married couples in our group renewed wedding vows at the site revered as the place where Jesus turned the water into wine. It is a remarkably ordinary kind of a place. And we were all pretty ordinary kind of people. But when I looked at those renewing their vows, there was something extraordinary in their eyes and in the glistening tears streaming down their cheeks. They'd been married for years and had become accustomed to one another in so many ways. But in a moment, water was transformed into wine, old married people were transformed into brides and grooms, and "things which had grown old are being made new."

*When Jesus enters the story, diversity is transformed into oneness.* In the dimension of God, opposites not only attract, they are brought together in a mysterious, purposeful, loving union! In that realm, a true unity emerges out of an incredible diversity! As two people become one, so the human and divine, the dark and the

light, the good and the evil, friends and enemies, the lost and the found, the slave and the free, the Jew and the Greek, death and life, are transformed when God's Messiah enters the picture. It seems the great transformation happens only in the presence of great diversity!

Tomorrow is the start of the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, a time when we are called to pray especially for the oneness of Christ's followers. That disaster in Haiti six years ago, the Syrian refugee crisis, acts of terrorism, and numerous natural disasters around the world have prompted an overwhelming experience of solidarity among Christians of all communions with suffering people. Differences are often dissolved in the face of disaster. It's a shame it takes disaster to bring us together. Sadly, the hot topic of conversation in the Anglican Communion last week was not helping suffering people, but the Primates statement scolding The Episcopal Church for our stance on inclusiveness. Their statement is a painful prelude to the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Today's psalm celebrates the boundlessness of Love Divine. The Epistle praises the way the Holy Spirit works through diversity. And the Gospel shows us that the power of God is at work in the midst of life's most painful moments, transforming diversity into oneness. *We don't have to be cut off from others who are different. God can unite us in his mission of love.* Our Presiding Bishop has suggested that it may be our vocation to lead the Anglican Communion to that discovery. I pray that he is right!

***And, finally, when Jesus enters the story, despair gives way to hope.*** At the wedding feast, the mysterious resources suddenly went out of the party. Bounty and scarcity were suddenly staring one another in the face. The groom and his family must have felt great despair. And, just as suddenly, Jesus put life into that which was lifeless, joy into that which had lost its effervescence, and all was transformed into a mysterious and wonderful hope as his glory was revealed.

In the face of tragedy, people often ask, "Where is God? Is there any hope?" Some believe bad things happen because God is punishing people for something they or their ancestors have done. Whenever Jesus was confronted with that kind of thinking, he rejected it. And, as Emmanuel, God with us, Jesus demonstrated that God is there not to condemn but to heal hurts, bind up broken hearts, and comfort those who grieve. When Jesus enters the story, despair is transformed into hope. Tragedies, disasters, and disappointments of every kind are occasions for some to find fault, to place blame, and to condemn. But for us, they are opportunities to respond to God who is tugging at our hearts with sacrificial, unconditional love and inviting us to work together with him and with one another to relieve the suffering so that "things that were cast down are being raised up."

The Chinese have a proverb, "The nightingale sings, not because it is happy, but because it has a song." Christians can resonate with this idea, because our hope is not based on external circumstances, but in the peace that comes from a trusting relationship with God. Hope endures, even in heartbreaking situations, because we are confident about God's love and convinced life has meaning. When Jesus enters the story, all our fears, all our hurts, all our difficulties are transformed into hope.

Let me ask you something today: Do you know what it is like for Jesus to enter your story and change water into wine? If you do, how long has it been? If you don't, wouldn't you love to find out? Being a child of God is kind of like being at a wedding; things can go wrong, and often do, but when Jesus Christ enters our story, what is ordinary can be festive, what seems to be different can be familiar, and when all seems to go wrong, there can be hope.