

Jesus Performs Miracles for Human Beings

John 2:1-11

by Rev. Michael G. Lilienthal

Let us pray:

God of love you have brought us good tidings. You offer us great joy. Your day and our rescue has come. You wipe the tears from our eyes. We have been defeated by our sins, by death, and by Satan, but you are our champion, and you make us more than conquerors. For this mighty grace which gives us the victory, we thank and praise you, and ask that you, true source of all compassion, who became poor so that we might be rich, and who stood helpless before humanity's vengeful power so that we might be strong and prevail, speak to us even today of comfort and hope. In the assurance of your Son's merits we pray. Amen.

*"Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:7, ESV).
Amen.*

We have before us today the record of Jesus' first miracle. It may be surprising to us that this, such a miracle as this, is his first miracle. If we had planned Jesus' ministry in our wisdom, we perhaps would have chosen a different debut for our Lord's power – perhaps the driving out of a demon, the eradication of sin, the resurrection of someone who was dead: one of these would be more reasonable to us. But we are to be reminded of the difference between Law and Gospel. Jesus and the writer of this Gospel account, St. John, approach us differently, for Jesus wishes to demonstrate himself in this Gospel as a true bringer of joy, who **performs miracles for human beings**. The text is recorded by the apostle St. John in the 2nd chapter of his Gospel, beginning at the 1st verse:

² Three days later, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. ²Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding.

³When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no wine."

⁴Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My time has not come yet.”

⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶Six stone water jars, which the Jews used for ceremonial cleansing, were standing there, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus told them, “Fill the jars with water.” So they filled them to the brim. ⁸Then he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the head waiter.” And they did.

⁹When the master of the banquet tasted the water that had now become wine, he did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew). The master of the banquet called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the guests have had plenty to drink, then the cheaper wine. You saved the good wine until now!”

¹¹This, the beginning of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

²³Jesus traveled throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness among the people.

This is your Word heavenly Father. “Sanctify [us] in the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17, ESV). Amen.

In this, his first miracle, Jesus showed great sympathy for the human condition, as he performed this – and all his miracles – **to sanctify our lives and to bring us to faith.**

I. To Sanctify Our Lives

In the ancient Latin hymn which we sang today, the fourth verse describes this event:

At Cana first His pow’r is shown;
His might the blushing waters own
And, changing as He speaks the word,

Flow wine, obedient to their Lord.¹

This verse proclaims the power of God in Christ, that his “human nature has been exalted not only above all...men, and even above the angels themselves, but also above every name which is named, not only in this life but also in the life to come (Eph. 1:20-21).² And in Christ, where his human nature was exalted, he has created the way for all humanity to be exalted. In Christ, our whole lives are sanctified, and we are put onto the path of righteousness that he walked, and carried along in his arms, as we sing in another hymn:

Till in heav’n we take our place,
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.³

Yet at this occasion Jesus says, “My time has not come yet.” That is, the time for the full revelation of his glory. He was not at this time to be fully demonstrated as God made flesh; he was not at this time to break so fully onto the public scene that he would instantly cause the great divide over him between followers and enemies. But he does still at this time perform a miracle, fulfilling the hope of his mother, and placing his blessing on the marriage at Cana.

It has been noticed, based partially on the miracle of changing water into wine, that “the great purpose of [Jesus’] coming was His will to sanctify all that is human. He came not to destroy human nature and relations, but to fulfill them by reconnecting

¹ ELH #173:4.

² Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures in Christ*, translated by J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1971), 241.

³ ELH #407:4.

them with God. Christ came to unite, not to scatter.”⁴ Imagine, for a moment, all human history condensed into a single linear story: At the beginning of the story, “God created man in his own image...male and female he created them.... Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 1:27, 2:24, ESV). But then man sinned and ruined the perfect world. Later, Jesus came, and, when he performed his first, small miracle, he performed it at a wedding, the first institution of human relationships, the first way human beings have ever interacted with one another, and quietly he gave a great gift to sanctify that marriage. Our human relationships, broken since the Fall, would be restored in this Christ, and he demonstrates that in this little miracle.

This miracle, in fact, presents to us a down-to-earth Christ, who is concerned for our daily lives, who is a “Friend of human happiness,”⁵ concerned for human feelings, human relationships, and human lives. The result of all Christ’s work, including this “beginning of his miraculous signs,” is that all human life is set apart and made holy in him. St. Paul encourages all Christians to use all our varied gifts in a way that is aligned with Christ’s renewed picture of the world:

Do not just pretend to love others. Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another with brotherly love. Think of others as deserving more honor than yourselves. Do not be lagging behind in zeal, but be fervent in spirit, as you continue to serve the Lord. Be joyful in hope. Endure trials patiently. Persist in prayer. Share with the saints who are in need. Be quick to welcome strangers as guests. (Rom. 12:9-13)

⁴ Lindemann 167.

⁵ Ibid.

Yes, this is the Christian life that is to follow the sanctification given by Christ. God became fully human in order to make humanity more divine. This miracle is just one glimpse of such a trend. But this glimpse, like all epiphanies of our Savior, is designed with a specific purpose, one which St. John records for us explicitly: “He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.” Every epiphany of Christ, in which his divinity reveals its glory, is designed to inspire faith; that is, it is the shining Gospel.

II. To Bring Us to Faith

This is why another of our hymns, paraphrasing Joshua’s declaration, sings:

Then here will I and mine today
A solemn cov’nant make and say:
Though all the world forsake Thy Word,
I and my house will serve the Lord.⁶

Witnessing Christ’s glory, even a small amount of it, must inspire faith. To not have such a reaction is to deny that Jesus is who he says he is, namely, God made flesh and the Savior from sin. He is intimately concerned with our situation, our humanity, and our human joys and sorrows, because that is where we are, and he wishes to cause us to be with himself. For that wedded couple at Cana, there was an immediate need: “the wine was gone,” and still a good deal of time in which the guests needed to be entertained. But Jesus took up the cause.

He has, in fact, taken up the cause for each one of us: Haven’t you had immediate needs—lack of food, of money, of any temporal good? You needed help, and help came! But more than just temporary things—and indeed, God is there to give

⁶ *ELH* #190:5.

us our daily bread, “For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:45, ESV), God provides our eternal needs: our salvation. Every gift of God, in fact, leads us to this. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,” sang the psalmist, and if only our eyes were open to see it, we would see the end: “and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Ps. 23:6, ESV). Rev. Ulrich Vilhelm Koren put it this way:

Why does He follow us like that, and give us so many joys? In order to draw us to Himself. God’s goodness will lead us to repentance. In order that we should believe in Him and acknowledge Him as our Savior and Lord, that’s why He follows us. For if we don’t know Him as our Savior, then what He has done for us has not achieved its purpose. How does it help us if things go well for us, unless we learn to know the eternal good? What help is it to have happy days here unless we receive a happy eternity through Him? What help is it for a sorrow or burden to be taken from us if we retain the burden of sin? Now look at your life and His guidance in this light, and ask yourselves if He has achieved His purpose! Is He with you in sorrow and joy? Is He invited to your house? Do you avoid the ‘joys’ where He is not present, and do you thank Him for the happiness you enjoy? Do you believe in Him and strive to be present in the eternal wedding joy?⁷

Jesus, the heavenly Bridegroom, sanctified this earthly marriage, firstly because he wishes to sanctify all human relationships and to craft them into his perfect image, but ultimately because he wishes to bring us into the greatest and eternal relationship with himself. In Paradise, the relationships were all aligned in their proper, godly, perfect order: God was the head of all, and the husband the head of his wife, and the beasts

⁷ U. V. Koren, *U. V. Koren’s Works, Volume 1: Sermons*, translated by Mark DeGarmeaux (Mankato, MN: Lutheran Synod Book Company, 2013), 90.

ruled over by man and wife. At the Fall, however, a beast held sway over the woman, whom her husband watched fall into sin while standing by, even as they both sought to become “like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5, ESV). Even now, we feel the effects of that corruption, and we perpetuate it. We have cast off God as our head: we would prefer to be our own gods, we would prefer to sleep in than come to hear his Word, we would prefer to allow our schedules to be ruled by our children’s sporting events than by our Creator’s wish to speak to us, we would prefer to watch our favorite T.V. shows than to hear the messages of God. Our relationship with the divine is ruined, as are all our human relationships.

But as Jesus sanctifies all these things, he brings the witness of himself in human flesh: and “these are written so 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 20:31, ESV). “These” things are all the miracles Jesus performed for human beings, all his healings, all his raisings, all his tendings and carings, but ultimately, “these” things culminate in the greatest miracles of all:

- 1) God himself died for human beings. That divine being who controlled creation, whom water and wine, sea and wind, life and death obey, himself handed his soul into the arms of death, exchanging his life for ours.

- 2) That dead God-Man, after three days in the tomb, who raised others from the dead, raised also himself from the dead.

The way things were supposed to be had been flipped on their head by sinful man. Jesus came into that mess, pushed his way through it all, and forced it into a

perfect reversal. Man was contrary to God, so that man and God were, in fact, perfect opposites: Man=sinful, God=holy; Man=powerless, God=omnipotence; Man=dead, God=life. Jesus became sin for us, yet holy God. Jesus became a powerless infant, yet with the power of God. Jesus went into death for us, yet with the life-force of God. Because Jesus merged together these opposites, no longer is Man the opposite of God, but we “have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Rom. 8:15-17, ESV).

We read in John’s account: “When the master of the banquet tasted the water that had now become wine, he did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew).” We do not have the excuse that the master of the banquet had. Jesus was not yet revealed fully. Instead, we are closer to those servants who had drawn the water: we know. We know what Jesus has done, and more, we know why he has done it, and for whom he has done it. Jesus performed all his miracles, and he even lived and died and rose again, for human beings, for all human beings, for you and me. Because God became man and brought his power to mankind in this gracious way, we have been saved.

Amen.

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