

Sermons at First Church

A Ministry of the Word
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First Presbyterian Church
Clarksburg, WV

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John 2:1-11

See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north, and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth . . . (Jeremiah 31:8 N.R.S.V.)

A Waste of a Good Miracle?

Strange things happen at weddings. Every pastor I know has wedding stories.

One of my favorites is about the little boy who was so proud of his job as the ring bearer. He was all smiles as he made his way down the aisle. Suddenly one of the rings fell off the pillow, rolled across the floor and fell into a heating vent. The little boy stopped and broke into tears.

His mother came quickly to his side and whispered in his ear, “Its all right, sweetheart, that was not the real ring.”

The little boy sniffled and asked, “Not the real ring?” His mother smiled and nodded.

The little boy stomped his foot and let out a howl. “I want the real ring!”

Another pastor tells about a wedding where several people didn’t bother to RSVP but showed up at the reception anyway. They figured there would be plenty of food. There wasn’t. Can you say “awkward?”

You can bet that things were equally awkward at the wedding in Galilee so long ago. Too many guests had shown up for the wedding, and they were running out of wine. The hosts were about to be greatly embarrassed. Mary must have been a relative of the hosts, because she takes it upon herself to fix the problem. She goes to Jesus and asks him to perform a miracle.

Although Jesus is at first reluctant, he does as his mother asks and turns the water into wine. This has always struck me as a waste of a good miracle. In the face of all the world’s pressing problems, having enough wine for the party seems rather trivial.

The starving were not fed. The blind were not healed. The dead were not raised. The masses were not shown the glory of God. It was all so very mundane.

It is a reminder to us that God often works in unexpected ways and in unexpected places. God is not subject to our logic and reason. As the old saying puts it, “God moves in mysterious ways his wonders to perform.”

God works in unexpected ways, that is the first thing I want to point out. The second thing is that God often asks for our participation. If you want to see the miracles of God, then do what he tells you to do.

In our lesson, Mary says to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you to do.” That the servants do what Jesus says is a minor miracle in and of itself.

Notice that Jesus does not pray over the water. He doesn’t make any magic motions or even symbolically dip his finger in the water. He just says fill those stone jars there with water. Now draw some out and take it to the steward of the feast.

Let me point out that the jars that were setting there were for the Jewish rites of purification. This water was not drinking water. It was the water used to wash the hands and feet of the guests. It was bath water.

Can you imagine them running out of water at a fancy restaurant and the servers going next door to dip some water out of the bathtub to serve to the guests? That sort of thing is unthinkable.

It would have been just as unthinkable in Bible times. These servants could have lost or jobs or been beaten or even both for such faux pas.

If we want to see the miracles of God, we have to be willing to do what he tells us to do.

Now I’ll admit that it is sometimes difficult to know what God wants us to do. As a matter of fact, it is sometimes difficult to tell what people want us to do.

There is a funny story about a mother who was visiting her daughter. For breakfast, the daughter fixed herself a cup of coffee and fixed her mother a cup of tea. The mother said, “Why did you fix me tea? I would much rather have coffee.”

The daughter said, “But Mom, when I was growing up, you and Dad always drank tea for breakfast.”

Mom said, “Yes, that’s true. Early on in our marriage I decided it was too much bother to fix both tea and coffee. Since your dad liked tea, I always just drank tea as well.”

The daughter said, “Mom, after 35 years of marriage I would think it would be time to have coffee for breakfast if that is what you want.”

The mother thought about that and decided her daughter was right. So the next morning she

fixed tea for her husband and coffee for herself. Her husband looked at this cup and complained, “Why is it all of a sudden you are allowed to drink coffee, but I still have to drink tea.” (Dynamic Preaching, January 2016, pg. 19)

It is hard enough trying to understand what people want, how in the world are we supposed to know what God wants? There is truth to that. Yet, if we are truly honest with ourselves, most of the problem is that we don’t want to listen.

God has given us the scriptures. God has given us the Holy Spirit. God has given us the support and encouragement of fellow Christians. God is not trying to keep his will a secret from us. The problem is that we want to do things our way.

“Here’s my problem, God, and here is how I want you to fix it.” Or again, “Here are the plans I have made for my life, God, don’t ask me to change - just bless my plan as it is.”

Yes, sometimes God’s plans seem illogical and overly risky. Most of the time, however, we know perfectly well what God wants, we would just rather not.

God often works in unexpected ways. If we want to see the miracles of God, we need to do what God says. And when Jesus shows up the ordinary, becomes glorious.

That day in Cana of Galilee Jesus showed up at a wedding. Weddings are special occasions, but they are not uncommon. People in Galilee went to lots of weddings. This was just one more wedding. A couple of generations later, when John wrote his gospel, no one could remember the name of the bride or groom. Yet, 2000 years later we still remember that there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, Jesus showed up and turned the ordinary into something glorious.

One of the most common mistakes that modern Christians make is in thinking that God can only be seen in exceptional moments. Yes, God appeared to Moses in a burning bush. But that doesn’t mean that you need to wait for your “burning bush” moment.

One of the things that struck me about going to seminary was how ordinary and mundane people’s call stories were. There were the exceptions, of course, stories about writing on the sky 10 feet high, but mostly not. One older woman who had grown children and a thriving career left it all to come to seminary and study to be a pastor. When asked about how she heard God’s call she said, “I was reading scripture for worship one Sunday morning. After the service one of the older ladies of the church came up to me and said, ‘You read so beautifully. You ought to think about becoming a pastor.’”

When others asked her, “So that was it? Just some older woman asking you to think about being a pastor?”

“Yes,” she said with a smile. “You don’t know this woman.”

Don’t wait for a burning bush. God comes to us in the ordinary. What could be more ordinary than a wedding? What could be more ordinary than Sunday morning worship?

It is always my prayer that when you come here on Sunday morning you will have a genuine encounter with the living God. That your life will be transformed. That this otherwise ordinary Sunday morning will be glorious for you.

If that happens for you this morning, it will not be because of something I have done, it will be because Jesus has shown up for you. And that has make all the difference.

Amen.