
GOSPEL FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with His disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever He tells you." Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested His glory. And His disciples believed in Him.

1. Enough has been written previously about marriage, so that we can let that be for now. We want to treat three points in this Gospel reading: first, the comfort married people have in their marriage from this history; second, the faith and love shown in this Gospel reading; third, the spiritual significance of this wedding.

[COMFORT FOR MARRIED PEOPLE]

2. First, this estate is highly honored in that Christ Himself went to this wedding with His mother and disciples [John 2:2]. Moreover, His mother was there as the wedding planner, so that it seems that they were her poor friends or neighbors, and that she had to act as the mother of the bride; thus it was no more than a wedding, and not a pageant. Christ lived up to His teaching that He did not come to the rich, but to the poor [cf. Luke 4:18]; or when He does go to the great and the rich, He does it in such a way that He rebukes and scolds, so that He comes away from them in disgrace, meriting

not much thanks from them, to say nothing of honoring them with a miracle, as He does here.

3. The second honor is that He gives this poor wedding good wine with a great miracle [John 2:10], and becomes the bride's chief cupbearer; perhaps He otherwise had no money or present to give. He never showed such honor to the Pharisees. By doing this, He confirms that marriage is God's work and arrangement. No matter how much people want to despise it and regard it as insignificant, God nonetheless acknowledges His own work and loves it. Also our Caiaphas has himself often said and preached that marriage was the only estate instituted by God. Who, then, instituted the other estates? Without a doubt not God, but the devil by means of men! They still avoid, reject, and slander this [estate], and are so holy that they not only do not themselves marry—though they need it and ought to marry—but they also pursue an excessive holiness in that they do not want to be at any wedding.¹ So they are much holier than Christ Himself who went to the wedding as an unholy sinner.

4. Because marriage has the foundation and consolation that it was instituted by God and that God loves it [cf. Gen. 1:28; 2:22–24; Matt. 19:6], and that Christ Himself so honors and comforts it, it ought to be very dear to everyone and treasured in their heart, because they are certain that it is the estate God loves. Thus they can cheerfully endure everything that is difficult in it, even if it were ten times more difficult. That is why there is so much trouble and displeasure in marriage according to the outward man, because it must happen that everything which is God's Word and work must be troublesome, bitter, and difficult to the outward man, even if it is otherwise blessed.

For that reason [marriage] is also an estate which promotes faith in God and trains us to love our neighbor through all kinds of trouble, work, displeasure, cross, and all kinds of adversity. These things follow anything that is God's Word and work. The chaste fornicators, the holy onanists,² and the Sodomites are spared all of this, and serve God apart from God's estate by their own activity.

5. Christ shows that He wants to supply what is lacking in marriage by giving wine when it ran out, and making it out of water. It is as if He would say: "Do you have to drink water, that is, suffer affliction outwardly, which makes things bitter for you? Well, I will make it sweet for you and change the water into wine, so that your affliction will be your joy and delight. I will not

1 Members of the clergy were to avoid attending wedding feasts; see James A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 191.

2 *Weichlinge*, Luther's translation for *μαλακοί* in 1 Cor. 6:9 (WA DB 7:100–101), where he understands it to mean men who practice onanism.

do this by taking the water away or having it poured out; it is to remain, but I will first add to it and make it full to the brim. I will not rid Christian marriage of affliction, but rather load it up." It happens in a wondrous way, so that no one understands it except those who experience it, namely, in this way:

6. God's Word will do it, by which all things are made, preserved, and changed. It is the Word of God which makes your water into wine and your bitter marriage into a delight. The heathen and unbelievers do not know that God created marriage (Genesis 2 [:24; 1:28]), and so their water remains water and never becomes wine. [God says:] "They do not perceive My good pleasure and delight in married life. If they did perceive it, they would have so much delight in My good-pleasure that they would not notice even the half of their affliction; they would notice it only outwardly and not inwardly. That would be the way to make wine out of water, to drown My good-pleasure into your displeasure in itself, and make good-pleasure out of it. But no one shows or gives to you My good-pleasure except My words: 'God saw everything that He had made, and it pleased Him very much' (Genesis 1 [:31])."

7. Here Christ also lets us see that He has no displeasure at the cost of the wedding nor with anything that pertains to the wedding, such as decorations, happiness, eating and drinking, as the usage and customs of the land require. These things can seem to be excessive and wasted expense and a worldly matter. [He has no displeasure with them], as long as they are in moderation and correspond to a wedding. The bride and groom must indeed be adorned; the guests must eat and drink, if they are to be happy. All this expense and behavior can be done with a good conscience, for Scripture now and again reports this, and it is written in the Gospel about bridal attire [Rev. 21:2], the wedding garment [Matt. 22:11], guests, and conviviality at weddings. Likewise, Abraham's servant gave Rebekah, the bride of Isaac, and her brothers "jewelry of silver and of gold" (Genesis 24 [:53]). No one should pay attention to the sour-faced hypocrites and self-made saints who are pleased with nothing but what they themselves do and teach, and will not endure a maiden wearing a garland or adorning herself a little.

8. God is unconcerned about such external things, as long as faith and love remain, and (as already said³) as long as it is in moderation and proper for each estate. This wedding, though it was poor and small, still had three tables, which is indicated by the word *architriclinus*, that "the master of the feast" [John 2:8] had three tables to provide for. Moreover, the groom did not himself attend to this, but had servants; and then, too, they had [to provide] wine to drink. All of that, if people did not want total poverty to follow, could have been omitted, as it sometimes happens among us. So also the guests did not merely quench their thirst with the wine, [but they drank more], for the

³ See above, paragraph 7.

master of the feast speaks about how people should give the good wine first, and then, when they were drunk, the poor wine [John 2:10].

Christ lets all this go, and we should also let it go and not make it a matter of conscience. They are not for that reason of the devil, if some drank a little more of the wine beyond [quenching their] thirst and became cheerful; otherwise, you would have to blame Christ for having given a cause [for sin] with His gift, which His mother asked for, so that both Christ and His mother are sinners, if the sour-faced saints should be the judges.

9. But the excess practiced at our time is not eating and drinking, but gorging and guzzling, carousing and boozing. They act as if it were a mark of skill or of strength to do a lot of gorging and guzzling, in which people do not seek to become cheerful but to be raving drunk. But these are pigs, not people. Christ would not give wine to them nor come to them. So also their clothing is not selected for the wedding, but for their own show and ostentation, as if those were the best and the strongest who wore gold and silver and pearls and used up much silk and other cloth, which even donkeys and sticks could do.

10. What, then, is moderation? Reason should teach that and take examples from other countries and cities where there is not such excess and ostentation. If I may give my opinion, I think that a farmer is well adorned when he wears to the wedding clothes twice as good as he daily wears at his work; a townsman, the same; a nobleman should be twice as well adorned as a citizen; a count, twice as well as a nobleman; a prince, twice as well as a count; and so on. So also eating and drinking and inviting guests should be guided by their social position, and the conviviality should be directed toward joy, not toward becoming raving drunk.

11. Is it a sin to sing and dance at a wedding, since people say that much sin comes from dancing? I do not know whether there was dancing among the Jews; but since it is the custom of the country, just as is inviting guests, decorating, eating and drinking, and being cheerful, I do not know that I should condemn it, except its excess when it is immodest or excessive. It is not the fault of dancing alone that there is sin, since that also happens at table or in the churches, just as it is not the fault of eating and drinking that some become pigs about it. Where [dancing] is modest, I leave to weddings their rights and usages; go on dancing. Faith and love are not danced away or sat away,⁴ as long as you are modest and moderate in them. Young children dance without sin; do the same and become a child, then dancing will not harm you. Otherwise, if dancing were a sin in itself, then we must not permit children to dance. This is enough about weddings.

⁴ That is, by sitting at table to eat and drink.

[FAITH AND LOVE]

12. Second, when we return to the Gospel, we see here the example of love in Christ and His mother. The mother serves as the mother of the family; Christ honors the household with His presence, miracle, and gift. All of that occurred for the good of the groom, the bride, and the guests, as is the nature of love and its works. Thus Christ invites all hearts to rely on Him as the one ready to help everyone, even in temporal things, and not to ignore them, so that all who believe in Him should not suffer any needs, whether temporal or eternal. Water must first become wine, and all creatures be transformed and changed into that thing His believer needs. Whoever believes must have enough, and no one can prevent it.

13. But the example of faith is even more wonderful in this Gospel. [Christ] lets it become an emergency, when the lack was felt by all and there was no other remedy or help. This shows how divine grace is. No one can partake of it who still has enough and has not yet felt his lack. [Grace] does not feed the full and satisfied, but the hungry, as we have often said. Whoever is still wise, strong, and godly, and finds something good in himself, and is not yet a poor, miserable, sick sinner and fool cannot come to the Lord Christ nor obtain grace.

14. But where the lack is felt, He goes ahead and does not immediately give what we need and want, but delays and tests our faith and trust, as He does here. What is still more bitter, He acts as if He does not at all want [to help], but speaks harshly and sternly. We can see this in His mother: she noticed the lack and complained to Him about it, desiring help and remedy from Him with a humble and modest request. She does not say, "Dear Son, make us some wine," but "They have no wine" [John 2:3]. Thus she only touches on His kindness, for which she completely relied on Him. It is as if she would say: "He is so good and gracious that He does not need my request; I will only point out to Him what is lacking, and then He will of Himself do more than was asked." That is the way faith thinks and pictures God's kindness, and does not doubt that it is so; therefore, it dares to ask and present its need.

15. But look at how harshly He dismisses the humble request of His mother, who speaks to Him with such great confidence [cf. John 2:4]. Now look at how faith is; what does it have in His presence? Absolutely nothing and darkness. It feels the lack but sees no help anywhere; in addition, God has become unfamiliar and angry at it, not recognizing it, so that absolutely nothing remains. It is the same as when the conscience feels sin and the lack of righteousness; or in the death throes, when we feel the lack of life; or in the fear of hell, when eternal salvation is lacking. Then there is certainly a humble longing and knocking [Matt. 7:7], asking and seeking to be free from

sin, death, and anguish. Then He acts as if now, first, there are truly sins, as if death remains and hell does not cease. He acts the same way toward His mother; by refusing, He makes the lack greater and more difficult than it was before she spoke to Him about it. Now it seems that it is completely lost, since the only comfort she was relying on for this lack is also gone.

16. Here her faith is in a real battle. Look at what His mother does and so teaches us. However harsh His words sound, however unkind He appears to be, in her heart she understands all of that not as anger or as against His kindness, but continues to think that He is kind, and does not let her hope be taken away by this blow. She will not disgrace Him in her heart and regard Him as unkind and ungracious, as do those who are without faith and fall away at the first attack and regard God no further than they perceive, like a horse and a mule (Psalm 32 [:9]). If [Christ's] mother had allowed those harsh words to frighten her, she would have gone away silently and upset; but instead she ordered the servants to do what He would tell them [John 2:5], and so proves that she has overcome the blow and still expects nothing but kindness from Him.

17. What kind of a hellish attack do you think it is, when the blow comes to a man in his distress, especially in the highest distress of conscience, that he feels that God is saying to him: *Quid mihi et tibi?* "What business do I have with you?" [John 2:4]? He must despair and give up hope, unless he knows and understands the nature of God's works and has been trained in faith. For he acts as he feels, and thinks nothing else about God than the way the words sound. He feels only wrath and hears only hostility, and so he regards God in no other way than as his enemy and angry judge. The way he regards God is the way he finds Him. Thus he expects nothing good from Him. That means that he renounces God with all His goodness. The result is that he flees from Him and hates Him, does not want God to be God, and blasphemes God, which is the fruit of his unbelief.

18. Therefore, the highest and most significant point of this Gospel is that we must give God the glory of being kind and gracious, even if He Himself acts and speaks differently, and all our mind and perception think differently. In that way our perception is killed and the old man perishes, so that only faith in God's kindness remains, and no perception remains in us. Here you see how His mother retains an untroubled faith and holds it out as an example for us. She is certain that He will be gracious, though she does not perceive it. It is also certain that she perceives differently than she believes. For that reason she lets it be free and committed to His kindness, and determines for Him neither time nor place, neither manner nor measure, neither person nor name. He will do it when it pleases Him. If it does not happen during the banquet, then at the end or after the banquet. [She thinks:]

"I will swallow this slap down: that He treats me with contempt and leaves me standing in disgrace before all the guests and speaks so unkindly to me, so that we all blush for shame. I know that He acts bitterly, but He is sweet." Let us do the same, if we are true Christians.

19. Note also how harsh He is to His own mother. By this He teaches us not only the example of faith mentioned above but also confirms, as Moses writes, that: "Whoever says to his father and mother: 'I do not know them,' observes Your words" (Deuteronomy 33 [:9]). Even though there is no higher authority on earth than that of father and mother, yet that is gone when God's Word and work begin. In divine matters, neither father nor mother—to say nothing of bishops or any other person—but only God's Word is to teach and lead. If father and mother would tell, teach, or even ask you to do something against God, and in the worship of God, which He has not clearly ordered and commanded, you should say to them: *Quid mihi et tibi?* "What do you and I have to do with each other?" [John 2:4]. So also here Christ does not want God's work done badly, as His own mother wanted to have it.

20. Father and mother are obliged—indeed, they were made father and mother by God for this very purpose—that they would teach their children and lead them to God not according to their own thoughts and opinions, but according to the command of God, as St. Paul says, "Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in discipline and instruction to the Lord" (Ephesians 6 [:4]), that is, teach them God's commands and words, as you have learned them, and not your own things.

So you also see here in the Gospel that the mother of Christ pointed the servants away from herself to Christ and did not tell them: "Do whatever I say," but "Do whatever He tells you" [John 2:5]. Everyone is to be pointed only to His Word, if they are to be pointed in the right direction. So these words of Mary ("Do whatever He tells you") are and must be daily words for all of Christendom, and in that way all human doctrine and everything which is not properly Christ's Word will be knocked to the ground. We should firmly believe that whatever is commanded to us outside of and beyond God's Word is not, as they boast and lie, the commandment of the church. Mary says, "Whatever He tells you, do that, that, that, and nothing else," for there is enough to do here.

21. Here you also see that faith does not fail, and God does not let [it fail], but gives more and more gloriously than we ask. Not only wine is given here but also excellent and good wine, and an abundance of it. By this He again provokes and entices us to believe confidently in Him, even though He delays. He is truthful and cannot deny Himself [2 Tim. 2:13]. He is good and gracious—He must confess this about Himself and in addition prove it, unless we hinder Him and do not allow Him time and place and the means

to do so. Finally, He cannot omit it, as little as He can omit Himself, if we only wait for it.

THE MEANING OF THE WEDDING

22. Third, we should touch briefly on the spiritual meaning. This wedding and every wedding signifies Christ, the true Bridegroom, and His Christendom, the Bride, as the Gospel sufficiently shows (Matthew 22 [:1-14]).

23. This wedding took place at Cana in Galilee; that is, Christendom began at Christ's time among the Jewish people and still continues among all who are like the Jews. The Jewish people are called "Cana" [John 2:1], which signifies "zeal,"⁵ because they are ardently trained in the Law and cling to the works of the Law with great zeal, so that the Gospels, too, everywhere call them zealots, and especially St. Paul (Romans 9 [:31?]; 10 [:2]). It is natural that wherever Law and good works are, there will also be zeal and quarrels among people, when one wants to be better than the other; but especially [there will be zeal] against faith, which has no regard for their works and boasts only of God's grace. Wherever Christ is, there are always such zealots, and His wedding must be at Zeal City, for alongside the Gospel and faith you always find work-saints and Jewish zealots who squabble with faith.

24. "Galilee" [John 2:1] means "border" or "the edge of the country," where you step from one country into another. This signifies the same people as does Zeal City, those who dwell between the Law and the Gospel and ought to step out of works into faith, from the Law into Christian freedom, as some have done and now still do. But the greater part remain in their works and dwell on the borders, so that they attain to neither good works nor faith, and conceal themselves behind the pretense and glitter of works.

25. "Christ was invited to the wedding" [John 2:2] means that He was promised long before, in the Law and the prophets. People waited for Him lovingly and called Him to make water into wine, to fulfill the Law, to establish the faith, and to make true Galileans out of us.

26. "With His disciples" [John 2:2], because people expected Him to become a great King, and also because many apostles and disciples were needed so that His Word would be preached abundantly everywhere. Likewise, His mother [John 2:1] is the Christian Church taken from the Jews. She was there as one who especially belonged at the wedding, for Christ was properly promised to the Jewish people.

27. "The six stone water jars" [John 2:6], in which the Jews washed themselves, are the books of the Old Testament which by Law and commandment

5 Luther is identifying the city name Kavā with the Hebrew word קָנָא ["jealous, zealous"].

made the Jewish people only outwardly godly and pure. For that reason the evangelist also says that the water jars were there "for the Jewish rites of purification," as if he wanted to say: "This signifies the purification by works without faith, which never purifies the heart but only makes it more impure." This is a Jewish purification, but not a Christian or spiritual one.

28. The fact that there were six of the water jars signifies the labor and work involved in that purification for those who deal with works. The heart has no rest in them, since the Sabbath, the seventh day, is not there, when we can rest from our works and let God work in us. There are six workdays on which God created the heavens and the earth and commanded us to work. The seventh day is the day of rest [cf. Gen. 2:1-3], on which we are not to trouble ourselves with works of the Law, but let God work in us through faith, while we keep quiet and take a holiday from our works of the Law.

29. The water in them is the understanding and mind of the Law—according to which the conscience is guided—and is comprised of letters (as in the water jars).

30. [The water jars] are made of stone, as were the tablets of Moses [Exod. 24:12], but they signify the stiff-necked people of the Jews. Just as their hearts are against the Law, so the Law appears outwardly to be against them. It seems harsh and heavy to them, and therefore it is harsh and heavy. That causes their hearts to be hard and heavy to the Law. We all find, perceive, and experience that we are hard and heavy toward the good, and yielding and weak toward the evil. The wicked do not perceive this, but it is perceived by those who want to be godly and trouble themselves with their works. That is the two or three measures of these water jars.

31. To change water into wine is to make the understanding of the Law delightful. That happens in this way: Before the Gospel comes, everyone understands that the Law demands our works and that we must satisfy it with our works. That understanding produces either hardened, arrogant dissemblers and hypocrites, harder than any stone water jar, or anxious, troubled consciences. The water in the water jars always remains fearful and timid before God's judgment. This is the water-understanding. No one drinks from it; no one becomes cheerful from it. Rather, it is only for washing and purifying, but no one ever becomes truly pure inwardly.

The Gospel explains the Law in this way: It demands more than we can do and wants to have a different man than we are, one who can keep it. That is, it demands Christ and promotes Him, so that through His grace we become different people in faith, people like Christ, and then do truly good works. Thus the true understanding and meaning of the Law is to lead us to the knowledge of our inability and to drive us to seek grace and help not from ourselves, but from another—namely, from Christ.

32. Therefore, when Jesus wanted to make wine, He had them pour in still more water, up to the brim [John 2:7]. The Gospel comes and explains the understanding of the Law most fully (as was said). It explains how what we do is nothing but sin. For that reason we cannot get free from our sins through the Law. When the two or three measures hear this—namely, the good hearts who have troubled themselves with works according to the Law, and already themselves have a timid and troubled conscience—this understanding frightens them still more; the water threatens to overflow the brim of the jar. Before this they felt heavy and hard toward the good, but still thought they could measure up to it with their works. Now they hear that they are of no use at all and that it is impossible for them to measure up to it with their works. Then the jar is all too full of water, so that it can never hold more. Then the Law is most highly understood, and the result is only despair.

33. Then the comforting Gospel comes and makes the water into wine. When the heart hears that Christ fulfills the Law for us and takes our sin on Himself, then it no longer cares that impossible things are demanded by the Law and that we must despair and desist from our works. It is an excellent and delectable thing that the Law is so deep and so high, so holy and true and good, and demands such great things; it is loved and praised because it demands so many great things. The reason is that the heart now has in Christ all that the Law demands, and [the heart] would be utterly sad if it demanded less. Now the Law, which was previously hard, heavy, and impossible, is delightful and easy, because it now lives in the heart by the Spirit. There is no longer water in the water jars; it has become wine, it has been distributed, it has been drunk and has made the heart cheerful.

34. The servants [John 2:5, 7, 9] are all the preachers of the New Testament, such as the apostles and their successors.

35. The drawing [of the wine, John 2:8] and filling the glasses is taking this understanding from Scripture and preaching it to all the world, which is invited to the wedding of Christ.

36. The servants knew (the evangelist tells us) where the wine came from [John 2:9] and that it had been water. Only the apostles and their successors understand how the Law becomes delightful and pleasant through Christ, and how the Gospel fulfills the Law by faith but not with works; it has become entirely different than it was previously in works.

37. The master of the feast tastes that the wine is good but does not know where it came from. This master of the feast is the old priesthood among the Jews who knew only about works. Nicodemus was one of them (John 3 [:9]). He certainly is impressed by Christ but does not know how that happens or where it came from, since he still clings to works. Those who teach works cannot understand and recognize the Gospel and what is done from faith.

38. He summons the bridegroom and reproaches him for giving the good wine last, when everyone else gives the inferior [wine] last [John 2:10]. To this very day the Jews are astonished that the preaching of the Gospel was delayed so long and now first came to the Gentiles, while they so long had to drink bad wine and had to bear "the burden and heat of the day" [Matt. 20:12] so long in the Law, as is said elsewhere in the Gospel.⁶

39. Note that God and men proceed in contradictory ways. Men first give the best, and then the worse. God first [gives] the cross and suffering, and then honor and salvation. That is because men seek to preserve the old man; for that reason they teach us to keep the Law by works and make great and sweet promises. But it turns out flat and tastes bad, for the conscience becomes worse the longer it goes on, even if it does not feel this misery because it is so drunk on those great promises. But finally, after the wine has been swallowed and the false promises are gone, then [the misery] will find them. At first God causes the bad conscience and gives bad wine, even mere water; but afterward He comforts us in the Gospel with His promises, which endure forever.