



**SAINT THOMAS CHURCH FIFTH AVENUE**  
**in the City of New York**  
*The Reverend Canon Carl F. Turner, Rector*  
[www.SaintThomasChurch.org](http://www.SaintThomasChurch.org)

**Sunday, January 20, 2019**  
*The Second Sunday After the Epiphany*

*Festal Eucharist*  
*at 11:00 a.m.*

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A Sermon by  
The Reverend Matthew Moretz, *Associate Rector*  
*on*  
Isaiah 62:1-5 and John 2:1-11

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### **The Power of a Wedding**

Epiphany is the season of divine manifestations, those first glimpses of God as Emmanuel, God with us in the first glimpses of the life and ministry of Jesus in the Gospels. Two weeks ago, this season, we witnessed the magi forge their way through the crags and dunes of the wilderness, following the signs of heaven, like a rainbow to a pot of gold, to find the glory of almighty God shining from a helpless baby. Last week, in our Scriptures, we read of another one of God's Epiphanies, when Jesus was baptized in the river Jordan. This, too, was another vulnerable moment in the life of Jesus, when he was plunged into the murky waters by his wide-eyed cousin, John. And at this new beginning, the Holy Spirit, the full glory of the Lord, descended upon the world, not like a host of armored angels, but like a small and delicate creature, fluttering down as a holy dove. And the voice from above: "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Such an Epiphany surely begged the question from those who were there: "What is so special about him? What will he do with God's favor? What will he do with God's love?"

Well, the writer of John's Gospel tells us of the very first of the signs of this love, and what is it? Not a star in the sky. Not an opening of the heavens with a loving voice. Instead, it is the transmutation of water into wine at a wedding in his home district of Galilee. The wedding party was about to run out of wine, something that would call the entire event into question. And so, Jesus asks for six stone jars to be filled with water, and miraculously the head waiter tastes from the jars, and instead of drinking water, he finds that it is wine. And not only wine, but even better wine than they had at the beginning of the party. The honor of the bride and bridegroom is salvaged, and the party can continue its proper course. And then John writes that this miracle "manifested forth glory; and his disciples believed in him." This event has somehow strengthened the disciples' conviction and trust, although it is rather modest in comparison to the epic scale of the previous epiphanies. Why does it matter so much to them? Why should it matter so much to us?

Well, Jesus is not only working on the surface, here. This miracle at Cana is pregnant with vivid signs that would have communicated deep meaning to these faithful Jewish disciples.

Firstly, it was at a wedding. Weddings are important to Jesus' people because the Hebrew prophets repeatedly proclaim, when Israel is in right relationship with God, that it is as if God is the Bridegroom and Israel is the Bride. You may have noticed in our reading from Isaiah that Zion no longer has the name Desolate or Forsaken, but the land of Zion, where God's people live, has been given a new name: "Beulah" which means: "Married." And Isaiah goes on to say: "as the bridegroom rejoices over the Bride, so shall

God rejoice over you.” So, all Jesus’ disciples and the writer of the Gospel, would have seen a marriage as an ancient symbol of God fulfilling God’s promises, saving them from desolation of a world gone wrong.

And the second symbol, wine. Wine is a key image used by prophets like Amos, Hosea, and Jeremiah. They say that at the final day when God reconciles all, that the vine will yield unending wine. In a Jewish text that was circulating in Jesus’ day, the second book of Baruch (29:5-8), it says that in the end times, the earth shall yield its fruit ten thousand fold; each vine shall have 1000 branches; each branch 1000 clusters; each cluster 1000 grapes; and each grape yield about 120 gallons of wine.

What Jesus does in Cana is to give the disciples a glimpse of the great heavenly wedding banquet that they have all heard about. Jesus is the one who makes the celebration last, he is the giver of wine, the drink of heaven on earth. Through the lens of this miracle, the disciples can see that Jesus represents the fulfillment of all of God’s promises to them, that Jesus is somehow the source and initiator of their salvation and celebration. They are stirred to see that a new day is coming, a day of abundance, a day where God’s promises are actually happening.

The banquet continues to this day. We are about to share a meal together, aren’t we? A meal like any other, yet like no other meal. The wine hasn’t run out for two thousand years. This meal that takes us back in time to the wedding at Cana, among many other meals in the Gospels. It’s a meal that takes us forward in time to the heavenly wedding banquet where all will feast before the glory of God.

The power of a wedding is to make the destinies of two houses become as one. The power of communion is that it serves to tether us together as one body, with one destiny, as we become what we eat, the body of Christ in the world, becoming, only in part, the incarnation of God’s promises for the world. This is why historical divisions between Christians are such a scandal, a stumbling block to faith, for our relations can look less like a wedding feast, and more like a divorce court. And so we lift up the reality in our Week of Prayer for Christian Unity that we who are many are not *many* bodies in Christ. We are *one* body, for we all share in the one bread. And it is our unity as Christians which will make it ever more possible to approach the scourge of racism in our country, an institutional sin that demands an institutional healing force. It is our own prophet, of our church and our nation, Martin Luther King, Jr., who we celebrate this weekend, who lamented the church’s silence, that we can, as he put it in his Letter from Birmingham Jail, often be “the arch supporters of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the Church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the Church’s silent and often vocal sanction of things as they are.” He suggests that rather than recognize as authentic inheritors of apostolic power, the Church can be “dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century.”

We can understand why our prejudices are so resilient. As James Baldwin said, “I imagine one of the reasons people cling to their hates so stubbornly is because they sense, once hate is gone, they will be forced to deal with pain.” It would be wrong to suggest that facing up to our mistakes will be a pleasant thing.

But at a wedding, at communion, at any circumstance inspired by the Spirit of Christ, the circle of trust and love and faithfulness to each other is drawn ever wider, secured in history through Christ’s presence, who endured great pain for the sake of love. It is the miracle at the wedding of Cana, and the miracle of the loaves and fishes, also, that proclaim that God’s vision is for the food and drink to never run out.

And so, you have heard of the abundance of God. Do you trust that God will provide for you? Do you trust that God may have you providing for others? Can you hear the invitation to this cosmic wedding banquet? So many have been called! What, after all is said and done, will bring you to take your place at that great table?