

Epiphany II Sermon by Bishop Michael Hawkins

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This beginning of signs did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed on him. +

They have no wine. From one perspective, this is not the biggest crisis in the world. It is much like running out of cake at a Birthday Party. Yet St. John tells us that this miracle at Cana is a sign, and we would do well to consider what it signifies. On the most general level, it is simply a showing forth of a glory which is beyond the merely human. It is, as well, a sign of God's care for us in Jesus Christ in the details of our lives - failed parties, headaches, disappointments, and the like. And it is a sign of more.

They have no wine. As far as weddings go, this is a disaster, especially for the wedding host in Cana, who was probably expected to provide for a whole week of feasting. But it is a sign of a larger

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and universal disaster. The wine failed, as the King James Version puts it, and that failure signifies something much larger, the failure of humanity and the loss of joy. But we might point out that it was their own fault.

My father-in-law calls people like this “hair-breadth Harrys,” people who like to fly by the seat of their pants and to cut it close. I know that there might be a couple of those Harrys and Harriets in every congregation, by the number of people who slip into their pew just as the first Hymn begins.

Humanity can be divided into two types. There are those who will allow forty-five minutes for an hour-long trip, and those who allow two hours. I fall into the second category, and so I can never understand how anyone in their right mind can run out of gas. Yet, it has happened even to me, and it happened in the most embarrassing of circumstances.

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Running out of gas is one of those situations that summons out of us those most helpful words, ‘How could you be so stupid?’ We do not tolerate people when they are the authors of their own misfortune, and we think that their stupidity and self-destruction excuses us from any obligation to assist them. Yet this is a most unchristian attitude.

The Bible witnesses to this responsibility within humanity for its own sadness. And it assigns this responsibility generally. It is not the stars under which we were born, but we ourselves, who are responsible for the mess we and the world are in. We beat about the bush about this, and we try to cloak our own fault in so many ways. We deny this truth, most especially, about ourselves.

Mary then summarizes the human condition in this sign: They have no wine. Our gladness and charity have failed. Things have run out, there is nothing left. It’s all done. We have made our bed and it is time for us to sleep in it.

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Whether it was cheapness, foolishness or forgetfulness in the host of the wedding, we learn there that Jesus does not reserve his sympathy for innocent victims only. Rather he extends his sympathy to us, who like that host, are our own worst enemies, the authors, editors and publishers of our own misfortune. Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. But we are to be more than just our own worst enemies; he gives us a part to play in the story of our redemption.

Jesus also was invited. Do whatever he tells you. Those two phrases would teach us, that if we are to be saved from our disastrous and self-destructive failings, we need to invite Jesus and to obey him. Our part is invitation and obedience. He will not crash our dreadful party, he stands at the door and knocks. He will not compel. Our wills cannot save us, but he will not save us against our will or without our will.

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Our part, as well, is to imitate the character of God, as revealed in and through Jesus Christ. In the continuation of that superb 12th chapter of Romans, we are called upon to fulfill our own particular ministry within the body of Christ. But in general, we are called to love, goodness, kindness, humility, dutifulness, patience, prayerfulness, generosity and hospitality, forbearance and the most Christ-like charity. Finally, we are called upon to rejoice with those who rejoice and to weep with those who weep. That is the work, real work, of Christian sympathy. And the test of our sympathy is when it extends beyond the common bonds of our own race or kind or class, and even as far as those we despise, and those whom we know to be the authors of their own troubles.

Remember, this was a sign, and Jesus manifested forth his glory. But what was the crisis? Shame. The host would have been dreadfully, perhaps permanently, ashamed. But what do we find

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instead? No shame, but the glory of God, manifest in our flesh and blood.

This was a sign, the first sign. Water is a necessity, it belongs to our survival. Wine is a luxury, it belongs to our happiness. The water of survival is changed by Jesus into the wine of gladness.

I know that most of you are surviving, getting by. We are all survivors. But God's will for us, as we know it in Jesus, is for so much more than survival, just getting by. Jesus did not die so that we could get by. He did not rise again to survive, but to have new and abundant and eternal life, and that is God's will for you, too. Our Lord said, "I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly." (John 10.10) And he not only shares his life, but also his joy, with us. "These things have I spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full." This abundant life and fullness of joy is God's will for you. He wants to change your

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water into wine. But you must invite him, you must obey him, and in gratitude you must imitate him.

Our creation, preservation, all the blessings of this life, these are water. But our spiritual mercies in Jesus Christ our Lord, the means of grace, the hope of glory, these are wine, the wine of gladness.

Jesus provides the good wine. What is that good wine and what is it worth? What is the price, the cost of the wine of our gladness? Wine in Prince Albert can cost between 10 and 30 dollars. But what is the cost of this wine, how expensive is our gladness? The wine of our gladness is the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, shed for you. This is the good wine, kept until now for you. In that wine, in his willing death for you, in his blood shed for you, we have the sign, the one sign. And in that, Jesus manifests his glory, and in that, his disciples believe on him. Amen. So may it be. Amen.