

The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke are called the Synoptic gospels. They are grouped because their structures and narratives follow roughly the same pattern. The majority of the stories which are told in one of those three gospels can be found in each of them. However, the gospel of John is structurally very different. One of the differences between the Synoptic gospels and the gospel of John is illustrated by our gospel lesson today. All four of the gospels begin the narrative of Christ's active ministry after his baptism by John the Baptist in the Jordan river. This is seen as the beginning of the three year period during which Jesus proclaimed himself the Son of God, demonstrated that he was the Messiah, and affected the redemption of the world by his ministry, passion, death and resurrection.

In the synoptic gospels, immediately after Christ's baptism, he goes out into the wilderness to fast and be tempted by the devil. In the gospel of John, however, the story which follows Christ's baptism is the story that we read this morning. Christ goes to a wedding. Jesus is attending this wedding with his family and his disciples. During the course of the wedding celebrations, which could go on for multiple days, the hosts run out of wine. This was a major social faux pas. To run out of wine during the feast would have been seen as a significant failure in the responsibility of the married couple and their families. This would end the festivities prematurely and signal that the family was impoverished and not a respectable member of the community. Mary the mother of Jesus takes an interest in the plight of this newly married couple. Perhaps there was a familial connection between Mary and the newlyweds. She explains the situation to Our Lord, who initially refuses to involve himself. Why? Not because he is indifferent to the dilemma or the social consequence. Rather, it is because he knows that to perform a miracle in this way, at this public celebration, would begin the movement toward the cross. This would be a loud proclamation of his Divinity, and those that would follow in faith, as well as those who would oppose him were an inevitable result.

This is what Christ is saying when he asks his mother what does this have to do with him? The literal translation of the Greek words here is Christ says, "What to me and to you?" Christ is expressing his concern not only for himself, but also for his mother. We can hear in his words a thought for the prophecy that a sword would pierce through Mary's soul, also. This is a road of suffering. But Mary is not deterred. She embraces this moment and the significance of it, commanding the servants to do as he says. Our Lord miraculously converts the water into

wine, and it is declared to be the greatest wine of all. John concludes the story by saying, “ This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.”

This miracle manifests forth the glory of Christ as Lord of all Creation. The earth and all that is contained therein is responsive to his command. We see the same kind of mastery over the world when Our Lord quiets the storm or multiplies the bread. He demonstrates the servitude of the created order to his designs. In this first miracle, the veil which hid our Lord’s divinity began to be removed. As St. John has previously said, he was In the beginning, and all things were made by him. In the words of St. Augustine, “When our Lord turned the water into wine, He was but doing the very same thing which He does every year in every grape of every vintage: the waters from above nourish the vine-tree, and are taken up into the fruit, and turned by His secret power into that juice of the grape, which becomes to us wine." This great annual miracle goes unnoticed by mankind because we have become accustomed to it. However, the great miracle of creation and the intricate function of the world is equally marvelous as the work which our Lord accomplished at this wedding. As John Keble has said about this same miracle, “The wonder, the Almightyness, is the same in both cases: the difference is, that at Cana and on like occasions the veil which hides His outstretched Arm was for a season drawn up, and men were permitted to see Him, as it were at work. For a little moment, and in respect of that particular action, their eyes were opened, and they might discern a little of what the Angels always see, the Creator of the world ordering and moving His creatures. It is a good thing to bear this in mind, when we read of our Lord's mighty works. We are apt to imagine that they belong to a state of things quite different from what we live in ourselves: but the difference is not in the state of things, but in us.” It is our responsibility to see in our daily lives the same power of God. In fact, this miracle teaches us to see that the great power of God which was active at that wedding in Cana is constantly at work all around us. We allow our eyes to become dull and unseeing because routine and automation rule our imaginings. However, the eyes of faith see the hand of God dressing the flowers and preparing meals for the birds. Creation is an account of the majesty of God, and each of the things which we take for granted are gifts to be appreciated.

And sometimes it is difficult for us to see God's hand in things like a wedding feast's good wine. Perhaps, the beginning of Christ's ministry makes much more sense in the other gospels. Christ fasted for 40 days and at the end of that time the devil came to tempt him. Now here is a ministry story.

In our own lives it may be easier to see fasting and prayer, the fight against temptation and a struggle with spiritual evil as more Christian than celebrating a marriage or a new baby's birth amongst our community. A feast can be joyful, but it is hard for a feast to be holy. However, this is exactly what the gospels taken as a whole present to us about Christ. He is in the fast and the feast. He is, in fact, in all of our activity and life. If he were not in something, we must turn away from it. But the rhythms of our lives, the progression of love and life together, he consecrates and beautifies by his presence. Thus it is possible for Paul to exhort the church, "For the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof... Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." The whole of our lives are to be offered to the Lord. As Christians, our lives cannot be divided into those things we do for God and those things we do for ourselves. Our celebrations are to be offered in worship just as much as our disciplines.

This is not always easy. When we are comfortable and happy it is very common to begin to forget about God. In the trials, the hardships, the good works and the disciplines we are quick to turn to Our Lord. But when everything is going our way, we think that the grapes grow on the vines because of our skill, and the water becomes wine over time by our own effort.

So the first method of making our feast worshipful is to practice gratitude. A thankful spirit in recognition of God's great generosity and care for us, brings glory to God in our own delight. The habit of giving thanks before the meal can become reflexive and thoughtless. But it is our responsibility to see God's gracious hand in the ways we are fed, offer true and genuine thanks. When we receive a paycheck for our labors, we are wont to think of it as something we have earned for ourselves. However, in truth it is a gift from God. Even in our hardest days, when we are bombarded with sorrows and discomforts, Our Lord is sustaining us and giving us what we need. Our whole lives are to be, in the words of our prayer book, offerings of praise and thanksgiving. We may recall the story of the healing of the ten lepers. Christ comes upon ten men suffering of leprosy who

beseech him for healing. He tells them to go and show themselves to the priest and on the way they are healed. However, only one man turns back and finds our Lord to offer thanks for the great gift he has received. The Lord receives the one grateful leper with the words, “thy faith hath made thee whole.” Referring not merely to his physical body, but also his soul. All the lepers were healed of their sickness, but only the one who offered thanks was cleansed from sin and made whole. There are many who receive great blessings in this life, but only those who offer thanksgiving to God are united to the life of Christ and granted salvation.

Another way that we glorify God in our lives is by seeking out the excellent and beautiful things of creation. In Philippians 4 Paul commands, “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.” When the wine Christ had made was brought to the master of the feast, he marveled at its excellence. And why should we be surprised that Jesus would concern himself to make the most delicious wine? The whole construct of flavor is unnecessary. Yet our Lord has built into our daily life pleasures which are wholly unnecessary. This is a part of God’s love for his children. And so, it is good for his children to seek out and produce themselves excellent and praiseworthy things. Good food, beautiful music, inspiring stories, well-ordered lives, all these things participate in an aspect of God’s nature. The Christian community should not be synonymous with mediocrity. We ought to make and love beautiful things. For centuries the beautification of the local church was one way that this was done. Each church was adorned by the local craftsmen to the best of their skill. You can travel through small communities and low income neighborhoods and find the most beautiful churches, with ornate carvings and wonderful paintings. These are the product of that congregations commitment to give their best to God. It is an expression of their love for God and their desire to participate in the aspect of his love which is beauty.

Finally, another way in which we can offer our feasting to God is explained in our epistle lesson. “Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” A generous offering of our abundance to our neighbor and even our enemy glorifies God. Remember, all that we have we receive as a gift of God. It is not

for us to hoard our wealth. Give a feast, not only for your closest friends, but even for those who you find it difficult to love. Offer your service and treasures to those that despise you. Do not respond to an ill turn by closing that person off. Forgive and return good for evil. In this way, the devil is overcome. An opportunity for evil to flourish becomes in reality an opportunity for even greater love to be shown. The spread of hatred and resentment turns to become the crowning of a saint. This is redemption, the work of Christ on the cross, and we are invited to participate in it.

And so let us recognize the love of God in his good gifts. Let us offer all of our moments to his glory in thanksgiving and generosity. And may our Lord's ministry be our pattern both in our fasting and in our feasting.