

St Paul's Lutheran Church (Latimer, IA)
Epiphany 2 – January 14, 2024
John 2:1-11 – God Blesses Marriage
Rev Peter Wagner

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.

Whenever I attend a wedding, I find myself reliving my own wedding day. I remember the anticipation, the planning, and then at last my beautiful bride coming down the aisle. Then I took her arm. We stood side-by-side, singing hymns, exchanging vows and rings. Then we greeted all the guests, took pictures, and drove our decked-out station wagon to the reception. Somewhere in there we kissed. The weather was beautiful, the food delicious, and many many dear friends came as honored as guests. A joyous day to remember!

And so, if the days ever seem weary, attending a wedding brings me fresh joy in the blessing God has given me. The wonderful blessing of a faithful bride and loving wife.

Weddings are about the bride and groom yes, but they are really for everyone present. Weddings help children understand that marriage is a holy and blessed estate. Weddings help young people think about what they should be looking for in a husband or wife. They make unmarried couples look forward to their own wedding day. They remind newlyweds of the blessing they've received. And they make all married couples, however long ago their wedding, thankful for the years God has granted them together.

So when Jesus was invited to the wedding at Cana, when he changed the water into wine so the feast could continue, you can be sure he was thinking about his own future wedding. His own true and glorious marriage, the wedding that all human marriage is just a shadow of. The wedding of Jesus is the wedding of the new Adam, greater than Adam and Eve's, or any other wedding since the world began. The marriage of the Lamb in his kingdom which has no end. Jesus was thinking about when at he would at last take his bride the church to himself, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, holy and beautiful, joined together in paradise forever.

But for Jesus, his hour had not yet come. It would not come, until after the hour of his sacrificial death. For he must go to the cross to obtain his bride. He must pour out his lifeblood to purchase her, to wash her dirty rags in his precious blood and clothe her white as snow.

So that day, as he awaited his own wedding, our Lord was glad to attend the wedding of Cana, to sanctify all marriage, and give it his blessing. He came as a guest and gave them rich wine, better than anything they ever tasted before, wine pointing to his own marriage feast. He teaches that the wine of his blood and the wine of his wedding is the richest, purest, most excellent wine of immortality that the world has ever known.

And his wine comes out of water. Just as we come out of the water of baptism into the church. Those who are baptized are brought into the bride, the holy body of Christ. Here Jesus takes us to himself and joins us in a perfect one-flesh union. Just as in marriage the two become one flesh, so when we were brought into the church through the water of baptism, we were joined to our bridegroom, to Jesus, as one body, one heavenly flesh, to live and rejoice in perfect unity with him forever.

And just as the wine at Cana came from water jars that were for ritual washing and purification, the water of our baptism is a ritual washing of purification that brings us into the wedding feast with Jesus. It brings us to his altar, where he lets us drink the perfect, cleansing wine of his precious blood, poured out for us for the forgiveness of all our sins, to wash us pure and unify us in one communion, one flesh with our Lord.

So Jesus came to Cana, and even though the wedding guests that day understood none of these things, his miracle was written down so we would understand. That day he manifested his glory to us. His glory as almighty God, his majesty to save and purify and make alive. To bring his precious bride the church to himself, cleansed and pure.

Oh what a wonderful blessing, that Jesus would first reveal himself and his glory at a wedding, as a picture of the great wedding banquet on the Last Day. Oh what a joy to look forward to the consummation of the age and our perfect heavenly union with our Lord. And oh what a wonderful blessing, as we await that day, to partake each week of the rich wine of communion, the blood of Christ that assures us of our place at God's wedding banquet forever.

But for now, husbands and wives, what does the marriage of Christ and his church teach you?

First of all, it teaches that marriage is a holy estate, blessed by Christ, who attended the wedding at Cana. It's a wonderful thing, established by God in Eden before the fall into sin.

If you aren't married yet, it may seem discouraging or impossible to find a faithful Christian spouse these days, but don't give up. Your congregation and your pastor are here to help. Your God knows the spouse he has for you, and he will give you strength to wait.

Second, it teaches husbands and wives. God has joined you together, and he has done a beautiful work in you. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no man separate. Let there be no quarreling or division among you. Let your marriage be holy and pure. "Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled." Let nothing come between you, husbands and wives, for your union is a picture of the eternal union of Christ and his church. Let no marriage be destroyed by the scourge of adultery, or pornography, or any such evil. Let husbands and wives live together in love and forgiveness, just as Christ always loves and forgives his bride, and restores her to himself.

And let no one profane or pervert what marriage is. Marriage is a picture of Christ and the church, the heavenly bridegroom and his precious bride. It is for this reason that a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. But for a man to hold fast to another man, or for a woman to hold fast to a woman, that is an abomination. A perversion, contrary to God's creation and blessing. It dishonors the perfect marriage of Christ and his church. It exalts human lust higher than God's gift. It destroys families. And it brings no opportunity for the great blessing and purpose God has given in marriage, the blessing of children.

Therefore, husbands, love your wives. Cherish your wife as your own body, for she is your own flesh. And no one ever hated his own flesh, but tenderly nourishes and cherishes it. He who loves his wife loves himself. "Just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body."

And husbands, what an honor it is, that God has given you the role of Christ in marriage. You are the head, the bridegroom. You are the giver, she is the receiver. You care for her, she enjoys your love. What an honor it is, but what an enormous responsibility. You must lay down your life for your bride, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. This means daily putting aside your own desires and demands, and putting her needs first. It means loving and serving her above yourself, and making her needs your priority.

And wives, what about you? That God has sanctified marriage means you are to take the role of the church, cleansed and pure, submitting in all things to Christ her Lord. "Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands." The church submits, because she is not afraid of Christ abusing her or disdain her if she fails to please him. She knows she pleases him, she knows he loves and forgives her. So wives, submit willingly, knowing that your husband is called to love and serve you, and that all he asks you to do is for your good. It's an honor and a joy to submit like this, so your marriage will be free from strife, and your home a blessing.

Finally, remember that there are three purposes for which God has established marriage. As our Lutheran marriage rite says, which I remember the pastor reading on my own wedding day, "Dearly beloved, we are gathered here in the sight of God and before His Church to witness the union of this man and this woman in holy matrimony. This is an honorable estate instituted and blessed by God in Paradise, before humanity's fall into sin. In marriage we see a picture of the communion between Christ and His bride, the Church. Our Lord blessed and honored marriage with His presence and first miracle at Cana in Galilee. This estate is also commended to us by the apostle Paul as good and honorable. Therefore, marriage is not to be entered into inadvisedly or lightly, but reverently, deliberately, and in accordance with the purposes for which it was instituted by God. The union of husband and wife in heart, body, and mind is intended by God for the mutual companionship, help, and support that each person ought to receive from the other, both in prosperity and adversity. Marriage was also ordained so that man and woman may find delight in one another. Therefore, all persons who marry shall take a spouse in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust, for God has not called us to impurity but in holiness. God also established marriage for the procreation of children who are to be brought up in the fear and instruction of the Lord so that they may offer Him their praise. For these reasons God has established the holy estate that these two wish to enter. They desire our prayers as they begin their marriage in the Lord's name and with His blessing."

According to these words, there are three purposes of marriage: First, for mutual companionship. Second, that a man and woman find delight in one another. And third, for the procreation of children.

These three reasons are all blessings. They are what completed Adam and Eve in each other, what made God exclaim about creation, behold it was very good. And these three reasons are what Christ our Lord looked

forward to as he sat at the wedding banquet in Cana. He looked forward to the mutual companionship of a restored relationship between himself and humanity, his creation. He looked forward to taking delight in his perfect heavenly bride. And he looked forward to children, children born of God through baptism, Christians brought before God through the marriage of the church, to call him Father.

What a joy, dear saints, that we belong to this union, that our God takes delight in us. And what an honor that we have been given the gift of marriage in this earthly life, to live out a picture of our Savior's heavenly joy. Honor and uphold marriage, and rejoice in God's gift! Amen.

Now may the peace of God which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, unto life everlasting. Amen.