

1-15-2017

Epiphany 2 One Year Series 2017

Phillip L. Brandt

Concordia University - Portland, pbrandt@cu-portland.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup_archives_sundaysermon



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Christianity Commons](#), [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Brandt, Phillip L., "Epiphany 2 One Year Series 2017" (2017). *Sunday's Sermon*. 52.
https://digitalcommons.csp.edu/cup_archives_sundaysermon/52

This Text Resources is brought to you for free and open access by the CUP University Archives at DigitalCommons@CSP. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sunday's Sermon by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@CSP. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csp.edu.

Second Sunday after the Epiphany – One Year Series
January 15, 2017

There are two sets of OT, Psalm, and Epistle readings appointed for this day. I am including the first set appointed because they seem to jibe better with what Luther is saying. If CPH or another service is supporting the second set of readings, let me know. They are also treated elsewhere in these notes and I can quickly assemble something for you.

Luther's words on the Gospel text are really interesting and I have included a relatively longer section of what he has to say about it and left my own rather brief notes on the other texts to suffice for now.

Luther takes this in a particular track which I think has great merit, but I also realize that others may not consider that this is the right way for you to go with your parish. I have included my notes from this Gospel reading and the Epistle reading from years past along with some sermon suggestions which are distinct from Luther's themes.

Collect of the Day

Almighty and Everlasting God, who governs all things in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the prayers of Your people and grant us Your peace through all our days; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

This prayer starts us out with God's power. He is almighty and he does not wear out, he is everlasting. He is in charge, governing with the authority which flows from his power and the fact that he is the creator of all. That is a lot of power. We appeal for God to hear us "mercifully" which is only right. After all, we are helpless before his power and before the power of our mutual enemies. We need his help. When the righteous and powerful bend to help the weak and guilty, that is the very definition of mercy.

Even the act of God listening to us, however, is an act of mercy. He really ought not to listen to us by right. We of ourselves have no claim upon the ear of God. Indeed, fairness should have shut that ear to us and our prayer. But God is merciful, so the prayer is spoken with confidence.

We ask him to grant us "his peace" through all our days.

What do you suppose his peace looks like and how does one know one has "his" peace and not another's peace? What other peace is there? Can the world give me peace? Can I gin some peace up from within myself? I imagine that they can; although, I suspect this will always be a cheap-jack imitation peace. But if I only know turmoil in my life, I think even the peace that comes from self-discipline, or the peace that comes from the brutal rule of a tyrant or a despot might feel like an improvement in some chaotic situations.

We pray for God's peace. That peace flows out of the cross of Christ, through the work, ministry, sacrifice, resurrection, and Spirit of Jesus. That peace comes not from my getting it right, but from His getting it right. That peace speaks my righteousness, not my sin. That peace declares

me to be something; it does not lay some unattainable goal before me. That peace is not found in the striving after a self-wrought perfection, but it empowers a much more profound and serious striving to live out the perfection that God has given us. This is not born of anxiety and trepidation at the prospect of failure, but is borne out of the sure and certain faith that God has succeeded in Christ.

But what is peace, God's peace that is? We probably need to start with the Hebrew word "Shalom" which involved much more than just the absence of war. Shalom was much more holistic, encompassing the entire human being and that human's relationships with God, self, and others. That said, we struggled to come up with a definition of peace or even examples of it. We share the peace in Church, but we are not even able to articulate what we are doing there. What do our people actually think they are doing when the turn to the folks in the pew and shake their hands, greet them, and smile.

We thought that this peace had to be rooted in forgiveness, in the potent working of Christ in us and through us. We proclaim peace, but that is another way of proclaiming Jesus. Jesus is our peace! (Eph 2) If it is my peace, or a peace that comes from me, then it will fail. When you put skin on the concept of peace, it always really looks like Jesus. Jesus is the flesh and bones of the word peace.

Readings *The lectionary offers alternatives for the OT, Psalm, and Epistle readings. I have opted to present the first of these options only.*

Exodus 33:12-23

¹² Moses said to the LORD, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' ¹³ Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." ¹⁴ And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." ¹⁵ And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. ¹⁶ For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"

¹⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." ¹⁸ Moses said, "Please show me your glory." ¹⁹ And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." ²¹ And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, ²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

This is a strange and enigmatic text. God's treatment of Moses here is challenging. The idea is pretty straight forward. Moses wants to see God's glory, and God only allows him to see him at

an angle, not straight on. For the face of God, the direct view, would kill Moses. But the conversation which takes place leading up to this is puzzling. Moses seems to be afraid or concerned that God is going to leave him. He doesn't want that. God assures him that he won't leave. But Moses gets audacious here and asks that he could see God's glory and God relents. The whole conversation is odd. God is not acting very "godlike" through the whole thing and yet to see him is dangerous, even life-ending.

It is interesting that when Mark tells the story of Jesus walking on the water and he is about to "pass by them" he uses the same formulation as if found here in the Greek translation of the Exodus 33. Jesus passing them by was not Jesus ignoring them but revealing himself to them. But their fear got in the way, they were terrified and so Jesus detoured and got in the boat with them, not passing them by but revealing himself in other ways.

Pay close attention to the revelation of God that he gives to Moses. He recites his name, here "The Lord" but, in Hebrew, the Tetragrammaton YHWH, the covenant name of God. This is followed with this strange sentence which also seems to be part of God's name. God says that he will be gracious to whom he is gracious and merciful to the whom he is merciful. It is wholly up to God, but notice he doesn't talk about judgment, punishment, justice, etc. God just says that he will show mercy and grace. That is the name of God!

Contrast this passage with the famous verses from the opening chapter of I John 3. There John imagines a day when we will all be able to see Jesus in Glory, as he is, because we will be changed. We will not need to be sheltered in the rocks.

The preacher who is attracted to this text may well want to play with the Psalm which is recorded below:

Psalm 67

¹ May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us, Selah

² that your way may be known on earth,
your saving power among all nations.

³ Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!

⁴ Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth. Selah

⁵ Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you!

⁶ The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God, shall bless us.

⁷ God shall bless us;
let all the ends of the earth fear him!

Do you remember two weeks ago at the Circumcision of Jesus when we heard the benediction story in which Aaron and his sons were given to recite a benediction which put the name of God on the people? The opening words of this psalm are the closing words of that benediction. A really interesting sermon could flow out of this – for the name of God in the OT reading listed above is that God’s name is YHWH and he will be gracious and merciful to whomever he wants. If you unpack that a little, there is some really powerful good news in that.

- 1. When Moses asks to perceive the essence of God, the unadulterated glory of the Creator, the Creator himself knows that Moses cannot stand it, but he still gives him a partial view, a glancing, backward view.*
- 2. God reveals his name to Moses, which may be more important than seeing him. It is YHWN, merciful and gracious purely out of his own nature. He just does it. He shows grace and mercy without any sense that it is bought, sold, or otherwise dependent on human activity. It is just God’s doing.*
- 3. God is very interested in this name being broadcast, shared, preached, proclaimed throughout the whole earth.*

Ephesians 5:22-33 I have extended the reading a few verses earlier. I think this is just necessary in today’s climate of hypersensitivity about matters sexual.

¹⁸ And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰ giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

²² Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. ²³ 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. ²⁴ Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands.

²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, ²⁶ that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, ²⁷ so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. ²⁸ In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. ²⁹ For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, ³⁰ because we are members of his body. ³¹ “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” ³² This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. ³³ However, let each one of you love his wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband.

Ephesians 5 is treated in Series B, Proper 16 which falls toward the end of August. Here is what we said about it then:

I have included the sentence which precedes this reading and I believe it is really important to do so. Too many of our hearers on Sunday morning will be unable to hear Paul's admonition to the women of his day to submit without being offended and therefore be unable to hear the rest of the text. Paul exhorts us to submit to one another. We are to be filled with the Spirit of God who changes us. Unfortunately for the current context, Paul does not use the submit word for the husband's role, but he uses the word love which has been so radically subverted by our culture. The husband is supposed to love as Christ loved the Church and that involved dying for it on a cross, a far more radical form of submission. All this is part of the mutual submission of the Christian to one another. As Paul unpacks this in the various vocations of life, he will speak of slaves and parents and children. Luther's treatment of this below fits beautifully into Paul's discussion of marriage here.

Paul starts with the basic building block of society, marriage. But because Paul has used a word which has become so emotionally and negatively charged, submission, we often cannot hear what he has to say to us. The husband's love of the wife is really an equivalent of the wife's submission to the husband. Stylistically Paul may simply be avoiding repetition. This is not Paul putting them into different categories. This is why the mutual submission of verse 21 is so important. Our culture has on one hand turned marriage into a sociological, legal definition, a contract we enter and which we can leave (divorce.) On the other hand we have understood marriage to be therapeutic, something which is good for us, as we define good. But our definition of good is usually revolving around some pop-psychological understanding of a soul-mate and our sexual desire. When those needs are not filled, the marriage becomes too easily disposable.

Paul is speaking of an act of God here. We understand that marriage is made by will of the participants who say "I do" to the vows and to their idea of marriage. But the Bible sees marriage as an act of God in which he unites two people into one flesh (Gen 2, Mark 10). It is always interesting to me that marriage was the one institution of our lives that was intended for us before the fall into sin. God instituted marriage in Genesis 2. Yes, marriage is poisoned by sin and often a place where Satan works great evil in the lives of people, but marriage is also part of God's original plan for humanity. No other institutions we see have such a lineage. Even the church is surely part of God's answer to sin and thus must be a post-fall creation. Of course things like schools and hospitals and government and fire stations, and the like are all part of the world after the fall. But marriage, though it has been affected by Sin, is part of the perfect creation too. It is therefore the image of something perfect, the relationship which Christ has established with his church. It is this fellowship which also is part of the pre-fall state. It was good for the man not to be alone. Yes, that would involve marriage but also the community of people whom Adam and Eve were to produce and who were to fill the earth. In a day and age when the world wants to redefine marriage to mean something else, the preacher has an opportunity to bear witness to what God has said. I encourage you to remain positive about marriage here and avoid the easy rhetorical points you can score by pointing the finger at those who abuse marriage. Don't bash the others here. Speak of what God has in mind.

It is also critical to remember that Paul is speaking of a loving relationship, not a power relationship. The woman who recoils at the admonition to submit to the husband may well be

doing so because she or people whom she loves have been abused and dreadfully hurt by abusive husbands who have exercised power and sinful dominion. The preacher needs to be very careful to delineate those two things. Paul is not advocating that women in abusive relationships should submissively “take it” because that is their role. Paul is speaking of a love relationship here in which the husband is caring for the wife, to the point of dying for her. In that context submission is hardly fearsome and demeaning. It is an act of love, never fear.

Paul says a couple of odd things here which should perhaps give us some pause before we rashly apply this text to our lives, however. “No one ever hated his own body.” That simply is not true, whether we are talking about some teenage girl who is starving herself to death in an effort to look like a supermodel, the suicide who jumped off the local bridge, or a medieval flagellant who whipped himself bloody as he walked from village to village, there have been lots of people who have hated their own bodies. Paul may be speaking of a reality which is distilled into some perfect sense, but one which does not always apply to this sinful existence we know. It is also important that at the end of this, Paul seems to recognize that he has lapsed into a discussion of the church and Christ, and exactly where the division needs to be made is not entirely clear.

But Paul’s words do lend themselves to a really good sacramental discussion which too often is neglected here. The Church is presented pure and without spot, cleansed by water and word. That’s baptism! And then the discussion of the two becoming one flesh could surely be taken to mean that we are one flesh with Christ, and that could also be a sacramental discussion of the Lord’s Supper.

John 2:1-11

¹ On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. ⁹ 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 ¹⁰ 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.”

¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

A couple of notations will help the reader understand what Luther is saying below. Most modern commentators focus on the wine, the relationship of Jesus to his mother, the miracle of changing

water to wine, the fact that these are jars for purification, or the final words of the text about Jesus revealing his glory. In my notes from a few years ago I made a big deal about it being the third day. Luther focuses on the fact that this is a wedding and that both Jesus and Mary attend it. Mary even seems to take on some responsibility for service at this marriage. He does so because the estate of marriage was under a full-on assault by the medieval Catholic Church, or at least Luther perceived it to be so. The idea that marriage was an accommodation to an unclean sexual desire meant that many people in Luther's day understood that getting married was a sin. Admittedly, it was a lesser sin than adultery or having an affair outside of marriage, but it was still morally an inferior place than celibacy and either a priestly or monastic vocation which renounced sex, marriage, and the world. There were some confessors who went so far as to absolve penitents for the sin of sexual intercourse within marriage. Luther fought a life-long battle to change those ideas and largely succeeded. By the time of his death his marriage to Katy and his many writings on the subject, including this one, had transformed how Europeans saw marriage and home. We usually place this under the theological heading of Vocation, understanding, contrary to many modern uses of the word, that vocation involves the whole life, not just the job by which we earn money.

Sociologically, it is also important to remember that people in Luther's day were asking questions which may surprise us with how contemporary they sound. We tend to have the idea that many people in the time were getting married quite young, were life-long partners, and that marriage was an unshakeable part of the society. This is not so. It appears the average age of marriage for many was in the mid to late 20's. This was largely economically driven. Men needed to be able to support a home. Luther will talk toward the end of this reading about the fear of a man that he does not make enough to support a family and thus is not getting married. Many young women entered domestic service for a decade prior to marriage. They were delaying marriage because the people of the time did not feel that they had sufficient resources to get married. Luther will challenge that as a lack of faith in God's care for them. Young people today, with college debts, uncertain job prospects, and other concerns are also asking these same questions and some are likewise staying away from the estate of marriage all together. But this is not only economically driven. Marriage has likewise been under assault in our culture.

For the preacher today this can sound a little familiar and strange at the same time. Oddly, we often find Roman Catholics to be partners in the fight to preserve the sanctity of marriage. Luther did not as you will read below. This shift has come about because the Christian estate of marriage has been under assault in western culture for over 100 years. We tend to think that recent redefinitions of marriage are the problem, but in truth the admission of homosexual and other non-standard relationships to the category of marriage only makes sense when you realize what western culture has been saying about marriage since the beginning of the 20th century. Luther, for instance, cannot conceive of a marriage in which children are not expected. For him, marriage simply is a fruitful union. In a famous sermon delivered early in his career, he even suggests that a man who deceptively marries a woman even though he cannot perform the sexual act, should write a contract with her which allows her to take another man as the father of her children. Luther is pro-marriage, but he certainly understands it differently than we do. While we may approve of the introduction of birth control to the sexual relationship 100 years ago, we

cannot deny that it has changed the attitudes of many toward both marriage and sexuality. Luther understood marriage to be more contractual and fruitful. We understand marriage to be much more about fulfilling emotional and libidinous needs. We need a soul-mate and need great sex in order to be happy, if those things are not present, many will find it grounds for divorce. Luther did not think so. He saw marriage as a means to have children who were effectively the social security system of the medieval period. Everyone needed children to take care of them in the event they reached old age.

Interestingly, at the time of Luther, there were many who were questioning the estate of marriage in much more radical ways than we see today. The radicals at various points proclaimed that the new kingdom meant all the old kingdom rules were dispensed with. In the case of some that meant open marriages or plural marriages. We imagine that the recent permission of homosexuals to marry is a shocking and new assault on marriage. The sixteenth century saw many similar movements. They were largely rejected, but they needed rejecting because there were many who were attracted to them and were experimenting with them within the Christian community. As you read Luther, keep in mind that he too is facing a culture in which marriage is being distorted. It is a different distortion than ours, but can we apply his sort of preaching to age? I think so.

Luther

On every holy day we are to worship our Lord God, listen to what he has to say, and learn from what he is tell us about Christ. So, let us read and learn from today's Gospel lesson.

1. As John states, this is the first miracle which our dear Lord Jesus performed on earth, a miracle whereby he wanted to manifest his glory to his disciples. They are to recognize from this miracle that he is the Son of God and the true Messiah, since he is able to do what no other human being is able to do, namely, alter the nature of created things by changing water into wine. Such power belongs solely to God, the Lord of creation.
2. This miracle, therefore, serves chiefly to teach us who Christ is and to seek his help and mercy with confidence whenever in need. He will supply it at the proper time. This is the principal point in today's Gospel.
3. However, inasmuch as we find that sort of comfort and instruction in all of Christ's miracles, we wish now to deal particularly with the miracle that the Lord performed at the marriage, so that the teaching concerning matrimony might also be upheld among Christians. For there here that is timely.
4. The Lord performed his first miracle at a wedding in the little town of Cana, when he was thirty years old. He had already been baptized by John and had then begun his pastoral, preaching ministry. According to the pope's viewpoint on sanctity, it would have been better for the Lord to have done it prior to this. But he did it afterwards, at the time he entered his priestly office and was baptized, anointed, and called by the Holy Spirit to be a preacher. In

keeping with this holy calling, ordained and consecrated by the Holy Spirit to preach and perform miracles, he came to the marriage.

5. We have here a pertinent object lesson for use against all false practices, fanatical spirits, and sects, not only against those before our time – now mostly dead and gone – but also against those arising in the future, whose so-called piety has been characterized by little more than opposition to marriage and other civil duties, and wandering off into wilderness solitude. All heretics have denigrated matrimony and have sought for and begun some newfangled and bizarre way of life.

6. However, it was particularly under the papacy that matrimony came to be looked at with contempt, and only virginity and chastity were extolled. If you want to live in a state of holiness and serve God, the word was, then forsake the world, enter a monastery, and become a monk....(T)he monks...considered their mode of life holy and perfect. In reality, however, it was an indolent, easy, undisturbed, sensual, epicurean life. It was a common saying: My son is becoming a monk or a priest; they have it good. How true it was, tragically. While they had everything, they neglected the world's poor whose miserable crumbs turned rancid and bitter; nonetheless they got the reputation of living a good and sanctified life.

9. Therefore, let us learn here how greatly our Lord God esteems the fourth commandment. For where people are married, there a household is constituted with father and mother, wife and children, hired hands and maidservants, cattle and field, all laboring for daily bread. The Lord wants to teach us that this is a holy and blessed life, that we should not disdain marriage but esteem it very highly as created and ordained by God, even as Christ did.

10. Accordingly, this Gospel is a good sermon for young people since they need to learn how they can serve our Lord God in the home; also, how unnecessary it is to undertake something special, in the manner of that unctuous and tonsured monkish rabble. For a father who rules his home in the fear of God, who rears his children and servants in the fear and knowledge of God, has a good, blessed, and godly life. Likewise, a woman who provides her children with food and drink, and washes and bathes them, need not aspire to a holier and more godly vocation. Household servants and maids, who do what the master and mistress require, are also serving God; and if they believe in Christ, they please God much more by simply tidying up the room or cleaning shoes than by all the praying, fasting, saying of Masses, and whatever else the monks regard as constituting divine service.

11. For this reason one ought in no way regard domestic life with contempt, nor denigrate it, like the monks, as being a worldly, unholy estate. For we see here that our Lord himself attends a marriage. Indeed, this applies not only to the wedding but to the whole business of maintaining a family. God wants family life esteemed, just as the fourth commandment, which stand first in the second table, points out.

14. We need to cite this truth and example against the false teacher and the pope, and today especially against fanatical spirits, like the Anabaptists and others, who say, There is nothing

but trouble in maintaining a household; it's always one thing or another going wrong; servants prove unfaithful; neighbors are bad and quarrelsome; there is no end to problems involving wife and children, just a whole lot of grief, toil, and worry connected with a family; on top of everything there is the burgomaster to obey, and also the prince. Amid so much unrest – and there's neither limit nor end to it in married life – how can you be mindful of God and serve him? For this reason I do not want to marry and set up housekeeping; I'm going to enter a monastery where I am free from all such disturbance. And so they run off, in the name of the devil, the one to this order and station, the other into that.

15. Let's take special note,...(f)or we clearly see here how the Lord himself, by his presence at the wedding, did not disengage the bride from the groom but let them be together, let them manage their household, and let their servants serve; meanwhile he himself even assisted them, so that the wedding could be celebrated all the more fittingly. By this beautiful example he wanted to teach us that he is very pleased when people faithfully assist and serve in maintaining the home. For even though deficiencies may abound, you must not be dismayed. Just make sure you have Christ at your side and that you live a godly life. He will turn water to wine, and so bless your estate that you will always have enough and things will work out you, even though you may be in want for while. At the proper time, help and comfort will be forthcoming.

16. This is what experience teaches. When husband and wife live together as Christians, our Lord God sustains them so richly that they receive more than they ever imagined or believe possible. And fully believe that, if you were to heap the total amount of money he could earn in a year in front of him on a table, a laborer, who otherwise very diligent and fears God, would still not believe it was sufficient to support him and his family. But here's where God's secret blessing is at work: today you spend twenty pennies and tomorrow another twenty pennies, and thus day for you experience God's blessing as you quietly manage your household. Our dear Lord, you see, today still changes water into wine, in my home and in yours (if we are but godly and pious and let him do the caring). Again, it is his doing which multiplies one piece of bread into ten, and causes one coat to wear as long as three otherwise. If we would but open our eyes, we would be forced say, Lord, it is by your will that our household is provided for; when we established it, we do so in service to you; you have honored and continue still to honor it with your blessing. For this reason I shall not disdain it, but make it my calling to look after it.

19. Now, ought not a God-fearing and pious maidservant, who must cook and do other things, take consolation from, and be pleased by, the example set by the mother of God? Shouldn't she say, "Are not the cooking I must do, and the other things, the same duties performed by dear mother Mary at the marriage? She kept busy, saw to it that everything was being done well, and so on. And even what I am doing in the homes is menial and insignificant, I still am doing it to the glory of God, who has commanded and wants me to be obedient and diligent, and I know that when I am being obedience am pleasing him. Let the world place whatever value it wants

on such obedience. Those who want to be Christians ought to regard it as fundamental and true worship of God and resolutely render obedience. Thus a servant can be very happy in his position in the home and do what is pleasing to God, saying. Thank you, Lord, for placing me into this position and service, because I know that I am pleasing serving you more than all the monks and nuns who have no mandate for their service...Therefore, I want to do it willingly and with love.

20. Whoever approaches things in this spirit will have pure joy and delight in his position and service, and were it already in paradise, our Lord God with all his angels would be rejoicing over it too.

(Sermons of Martin Luther: The House Postils Vol. 1. Trans.: Klug. Baker Publ. 1996. Pp. 233-241)

Sermon Idea Jesus was there (That the Holy Spirit would bless and encourage marriage, both among the already married, but also among those not yet married, and those who look back upon marriage from the perspective of widowhood.)

This sermon will be based on the simple fact that Jesus begins his ministry at a wedding. Luther draws much from this fact to speak of the value and blessing of marriage. We will have to do some “deconstruction” along the way, for worldly ideas about marriage prevail among Christians too and these are antithetical to what God says about marriage.

The following is a list of possible angles to take on this, a good sermon will not likely do all of this. There are multiple occasions to preach about marriage over the course of a year, save something for another day.

1. Marriage is a divine action – not a human action. Jesus is known for doing miracles. Indeed, in this text he famously sped up the fermentation process and turned water into wine. We usually need grapes, yeast, and lots of time to pull that off. But Jesus was also there doing another miracle – he was uniting a man and woman in marriage. His miracle of turning water into wine served that greater miracle. If you think about it, he was saving a couple from embarrassment. He did not want their wedding to be known as the one which fizzled because they ran out of wine. He loves a good wedding, he wants us to rejoice, because he is doing a miracle at every wedding. Our world wants to think that this is a human thing, in which a man and woman enter a contract which they can easily break, if they no longer want to be married. But has God dissolved that union? The preacher will want to be careful here. There are some unions which are dissolved through death, abuse, abandonment, etc. But we too often have taken that mean that if I think the grass is greener on the other side of the fence my marriage is over. This sermon will assert that marriage is a God event.
2. It is good and God-pleasing to be a spouse, indeed it is an act of worship. Jesus was always about glorifying the Father, and here he is promoting a marriage. The man and woman, who are wonderfully anonymous in this story, without even a line to say, they are serving God with this marriage, they are worshipping him. We too often consider that marriage is a self-serving thing which needs to be good for me or I am done with it. But

marriage is a good work which pleases God. That means sometimes it is work, it is not easy, it can be difficult. But it is worth doing because God is the real object of every act of marital love and support for one another. Your husband or wife may not deserve your love, it may simply be true. But that is not the only one whom you are loving when you love that person. Jesus and Mary both work to make this marriage succeed, at least the joy of the couple and all those who are present. He does not stand up and command or do so obviously, but quietly and through service and servants, he makes this possible. He loves marriage.

3. Marriage is not what you see in Hollywood, but usually involves the little things that are not easily seen, but God sees and his servants know. Movies and television have done us a great disservice by portraying marriage as boring, stifling, or, even worse, oppressive. Jesus is there, Mary is watching, servants are obedient. The master of ceremonies is oblivious, it is true. He is looking at the externals and obvious things. But behind the scenes, where only servants scurry about in apparently mundane tasks, God is doing something amazing. What looks like water and clay pots, are repurposed in God's blessing to become the things of great joy. It is not obvious that taking preparing a meal for your spouse, cleaning the house, taking down the Christmas lights, or washing the family car are special things. They look rather simple, even mundane. But those who serve are given to see and experience something much larger than the obvious. The cup of water drawn from the humble pot becomes a rich vintage when Christ's love is applied to that act of service.
4. Marriage reflects Christ – we submit to one another. Mary, the mother of our Lord, comes to her adult son and gives him what amounts to a command. He is apparently not inclined to do what she says, but she does not seem to take that into consideration. Perhaps Jesus' disciples have drunk all the wine and she is simply putting responsibility where it belongs. In any event, he submits to her request. It is not yet his time, but he reveals himself through the service of servants who are submitting to their duty. Another day, despite the tears of his mother, he will submit to the needs of this world and give over his body to death on our behalf. Paul speaks today of marriage as a relationship of mutual submission to one another (see my notes about this above.) At the end of that reading he does not seem to speak of marital submission as a thing to itself but as a reflection of Christ's relationship to us. We would come to marriage and think that this is all about us, but marriage, our marriage, whether that is to come, now, or past, is a way of understanding God's relationship to his fallen world. The preacher who opts for this model will want to step carefully. There are a great number of really flawed and broken relationships out there which we would not liken to Christ's relationship to us. That said, every marriage, at least in its essence as a union, however flawed that union may have become, every marriage is a reflection of Christ uniting himself with us.

Are there more? Perhaps we can add to this on Tuesday.

Here follows my notes and a sermon idea from an earlier treatment of this text.

Several years ago, when I started doing these pericope studies, I was blessed to have Ed St. John in the Tuesday group. Ed's family runs a winery in Sonoma, County¹. Ed tells us that 180 gallons of wine would be 76 cases of wine, each case has 12 bottles. If you are planning a wedding reception you usually figure that each bottle will serve 3 people. A winery would calculate that this much would serve up to 2,736 people at a modern wedding reception. Jesus knows how to throw a party!

In the years between, we have come to some sermon ideas/concepts which some have found helpful:

- 1. The old wine is the old creation – Christ's created wine is the new creation - see hymn #408 in LSB. The old wine cannot satisfy us, only the new wine satisfies the longing of our thirsty souls.*
- 2. The Rabbi's used to say that without wine there is no joy. Jesus brings pleasure eternal. See another LSB hymn: Jesus has come and brings pleasure eternal!*
- 3. Jesus' words to his mother seem harsh. On one hand they are simply the way that one referred to the female of the species at the time. But there is more to this. John is tying this event to the passion – this is exactly how Jesus referred to her from the cross when John is charged to be her son.*
- 4. We are we the clay pots, filled with baptismal water! Has Jesus turned what looked like simple water, common stuff, into the very joy-giving life which astounds with a new quality. This wine is "best of class." it has that Wine Spectator 100 rating!*

A sermon Idea: perhaps a story sermon told from the perspective of one of those clay pots standing there on a wedding day. It was a day when the wine skins got all the glory, they were but water pots which were used for the hospitable and ritual cleansing of the guests. Their water was used to wash hands and feet. That is what you were until the master said "Fill them." Filled full they became something more than humble pots. They held a treasure. We are, in the words of Paul today, people filled with amazing and wonderful gifts. We may not look that special on the outside, in fact the world may laugh at us and call us out of date and humble folks, no two clay pots are ever quite the same. But God has filled us with a treasure (II Corinthians) and we are now the instruments of his kingdom, Spirit filled. We often think we are humble, and it is true. We are not much, but that doesn't stop God from doing great things with us. The attention on that day was all on the bride and groom, the parents and the feast. But the real story was happening in the water pots, the simple earthenware that was purely utilitarian. No one had put this on the wedding registry, no one would buy this at Macy's and give it to the young couple. This was beneath notice – but it became the very vessel of Christ's miracle.

¹ If you want to check out the winery's website, you can find it at <http://www.pedroncelli.com/> Ed will happily sell you wine through the website as well. I highly recommend the Friend's Red and Mother Clone Zinfandel.

The preacher will want to take note that John himself focuses also on the servants. They are the only ones who see what Jesus has done. The Master of the feast does not. He just thinks the groom has done this backward. But the servants, the humble ones, they can see what Jesus is up to, they can see what he is doing. Your people are the servants – they can see. The servant sees the same things that the world sees, but he/she sees it differently. The world will not notice this kingdom in us. We will not get glory for this, but people will be saved, the thirst will be quenched, and the kingdom will come. It may come one cup of cold water given to a child at a time. It may come one little old widow comforted and visited. It may come one marriage supported and encouraged. It can come in all sorts of ways. But this text seems to suggest that it comes through the simple, the humble, the regular folk, like the folk who are sitting before us on a typical Sunday morning. They need to hear this. Jesus sees them and uses their lives to make his kingdom come. Celebrate that!

A lot of us serve congregations which are in decline. It feels like people walk by and never notice us. We are invisible to the world. These pots were essentially invisible. No one paid any attention to them. But Jesus did. Do we ask people to see themselves through Jesus' eyes? We often measure ourselves by the yardstick of success, as if our statistic report is the only way to know if we are really Christian. But the fact is that through humble things God does great things. The simple work of a community to care for the little, least, and simple can be precious in the eyes of God.

He is the one who turns our lives into miracles. The jars did not do anything other than be the jars they were created to be. But they became the vessels of a miracle. But that miracle was his doing.

Another Sermon Idea: These pots were purification pots, pots used to wash hands and feet, they were not drinking vessels, but when the word and water came together inside those pots, they became joy-giving and beautiful. They were still the humble pots they had always been, but now what comes out of them is no longer the wash water, but now is the beautiful wine of joy. They had been empty, now they are filled with what no one expected of them. They are the same old clay pots they always were, but now out of them flows something which God has made and which surprises and impresses everyone who drinks it. That sounds a lot like Christians who have been filled with the Spirit of God and now, though they still look like the old people, are in fact also the new people.

I love this text for a variety of reasons. As the preceding paragraphs demonstrate, it is eminently preachable and has some perfectly marvelous things to say.

The first words are themselves a whole sermon: On the third day there was a wedding... If you read through the preceding verses of John 1 you start to see a sequence of days which starts with John the Baptist pointing out Jesus to his disciples and naming him the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. But if you read this carefully you will notice something odd. There are

more than three days here. John may not have been a well educated man, but he was a successful business man. You can bet he could count to three. This is not a lapse, this is intentional.

What are we to make of it? It does not take a literary or theological genius to see that the key is right here in our text: the third day. It is not the third day in a chronological sense, but the third day in a very real and much more significant theological sense. On the first day John points to Jesus and says "The Lamb of God!" The lamb was a sacrificial lamb, one slaughtered for the sins of the people. That's Good Friday. The next two days Jesus gathers disciples. The ancient church had a very interesting practice of baptizing people under normal circumstances only on one day out of the year, Holy Saturday, the day between Good Friday and Easter. Of course in an emergency they would baptize any time. In Baptism Jesus is gathering people, gathering more and more. This is what he does in Baptism, he gathers people to himself. Then, on the third day, on the Easter day, on the resurrection day, on the last day, there is a great feast, a wedding feast, and Jesus provides the joy.

John seems to be giving his audience a precursor of things to come. He is foreshadowing the passion and resurrection narrative, but he is also saying something about his audience's current experience of Jesus. They are currently in the gathering days, another day comes, however, an Easter day, a wedding day, when Jesus provides the wine and it is good.

Of course there is another dimension to all this. At the end of the story John tells us that this is the first of Jesus' miracles, he manifested his glory and the disciples "faithed" in him. Remember that English betrays us here. We have no verbal form of faith, only the inadequate word "believe." The difference is all about trust, love, and relationship. I can believe you if you tell me that there is an elephant on the street next door, or not believe, but it becomes faith when I put my life into the words you speak. "I will safely pilot this plane to the place you want to go." I have to have faith in the man who says that me, or I won't get on that plane.

Of course, there is another place to run with this text, a theme to which the OT lesson lends some support. The whole idea of marriage and the metaphor that marriage provides to us of God's love for us, is a powerful message too often neglected in preaching. Of course we run into the whole reformation of manners which took place in the 1800's at this point. Luther, in the 16th century could be quite earthy in his sermons. He was not gross or profane, but the whole of life was simply that, the whole of life. Sometimes this meant he called his opponent Johann Eck "Dreck" which of course sounds like Eck but was actually a Low German word for the manure pile behind the barn. That sort of speech is considered out of place in polite company today, but perhaps nowhere other than in church. We certainly have seen a degradation of those standards on television. The rest of the world is ready to yell a vulgarity which refers to intercourse at the slightest of provocations. But from listening to our churchly conversations, one would never know that Christians are capable of reproduction.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the discussion of sexuality. Because we have refused to speak of healthy sexuality, considering it a private affair inappropriate for polite company, the void left in

our speech has quickly been filled by a sexual speech which is decidedly unhealthy, perverse, and often worthy of the epithet “disgusting.”

For the Christian this presents a serious challenge. The Bible repeatedly makes use of a sexual metaphor to describe the relationship between God and the people, the single most intimate and beautiful relationships we know as human beings. But because so many of our people are only familiar with the discussion of sexuality they see on television, this metaphor has become sullied or worse a picture of domineering perversity. God calls the Church His bride. He does not say “soul-mate” or “best friend” but bride. Everyone knows what that means, but can we think of it healthily and beautifully or does it immediately descend to pornography? At the point of his death, the great medieval preacher, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, was preaching a series of sermons to his fellow Cistercian monks, all celibate men. It was a series based on the Song of Songs, the love song of Solomon. He was only on chapter 3, but he was in sermon 86 of the series at the point when he died. Do we ever preach on Song of Songs?

There is another theme which runs in this text, that of the servant. It is interesting, in the same way that we saw several months ago with the healing of Naaman, that the servants are aware of things that the supposed master of the feast is not. For John’s audience which contained a great number of slaves, this was a way of valuing them. But it also says something about the nature of the Christian today. He serves, he is at the beck and call of others, the world, his God. He is not his own person anymore, but purchased with the blood of Christ.

But just because you and I are no longer our own people, that does not mean that there are not certain advantages to being a Christian. Indeed, we have an insight into problems and their solutions, into the workings of Christ, which the world does not see. We often are in the business of handing a cup to the world which it believes simply to be some mundane refreshment but which is imbued with the very mystery of God. Every time we bandage a child’s skinned knee, we are in a small way the hands of Christ.

There is another possibility with this text, which draws together a number of the other themes but which revolves around the miracle itself. Christ bids the servants to fill six large jars with water and turns it into wine. If you do the simple math on this, he creates somewhere around 120-180 gallons of wine. This is some serious wedding cheer.

In a rather puritanical society we struggle with countless issues of addiction and alcohol abuse, but again, I cannot wonder if this is in the context of a church which simply does not model healthy alcohol consumption. We tell our children not a drop until you are 21 and then we turn them loose and wonder why every year sees a number of young people drinking themselves to death on our college campuses. Without a healthy practice of consumption, they are suddenly, without any oversight, given supply only limited by their finances. I have sat through three presentations by the State Department, AIFS (the company we are using to manage the Rome trip), and from CU itself. All of them have told the students that Italians loathe American

exchange students because they are perceived as foolish about alcohol which leads to all sorts of rude and problematic behavior.

In the same way that we need to keep a healthy sexuality as part of our conversation do we also need to keep joy and conviviality as healthy parts our lives for the sake of our children? Do we need to insist that our churches allow a little beer or wine or champagne at the wedding receptions in our facilities so we can demonstrate that this can be done moderately, healthily, and joyfully? The ancients were also aware of the problems of alcohol. In fact we see a little of their accommodation of the problems. The master of the banquet was an important “official” at these gatherings who was strictly charged with making sure things did not get out of hand. He governed the mixture of wine and water. Too little water and everyone got drunk. He was to maintain a balance in the potency, to allow the joy, but to keep things under control.

This text is marvelous because God loves a good time. He loves the joy of a wedding feast. Jesus is there, when there is a problem which would dampen that joy for the young couple and their families, Jesus does his first miracle to prop up that joy. Can we really miss that point? No one was raised from the dead here, no leper cleansed, no demon exorcised, nor any blind eyes opened. This miracle is simply Jesus making sure someone’s wedding isn’t a bust because they ran out of wine. He spares a family some embarrassment. What is more, Jesus is apparently pretty good at the wine production. It is superior wine, wine which pleases the palate, wine which the master of ceremonies says is remarkable. Can we draw the conclusion from this that good wine is a godly thing? Probably that will still depend on how it is used, but that God made us for joy, that we were given senses like taste and smell and a sense of “good” and “beautiful” are powerful indicators of the sort of God we have and the sort of life he created us for.

Sermon Idea: The humblest servants of all – the pots (Gospel: That the Holy Spirit would transform the humble life of the hearer into the precious treasure house of God’s gracious love and forgiveness to the people he/she knows.)

John says interesting things about the servants of God today. They know where the wine comes from, even though the master of ceremonies, the guy in charge of the party, does not.

But there are another set of very humble servants one might consider – the very water jars which show up in this story. They have humble roles to play. They are the containers for water, and not drinking water, but wash water. People dip it out and wash the dust off their feet. They get the grime from the market place off their hands. But today Jesus elevates the humble and lifts up the lowly. (You might just remind them of the Magnificat – the song Mary sang in Luke 2)

Jesus sees the water jars there and orders his servants to fill them up. Filled up at the master’s orders, the pots come to contain a treasure, a beautiful vintage, which surprises all who encounter it.

This sermon will ask the hearer to consider him or herself one of these pots. We are humble folks. We probably have looked at ourselves and thought that we are not much. It is the default Lutheran attitude. But filled in Baptism, we have become, in Paul's words, jars of clay that contain a treasure (II Corinthians.)

1. Christ has loved the unlovable, specifically me. But that love doesn't just stop at the brim of the jar, it is dipped out and shared to the wonder of the host. I have a love which the world doesn't understand, but which makes the world sweeter for that love.
2. Christ has forgiven me in baptism. But forgiveness in the clay pot is not what he had in mind. He means it to fuel the joy at the party. Read the parable of the Prodigal again (Luke 15). Now I can say to any sin, to any sinner, "I forgive." God has promised to back up those words (Matthew 18).
3. God has called me precious and important to him, using the language of family – child, bride. That means that the guy or gal next to me at home or at work or at school or in my neighborhood is also somehow changed in my eyes – they too are precious, they are important. They are the very treasure of God. I see it, for I am a servant of God. The world may not, but I do.

This sermon will ask the hearer to believe what God has said about him/her and to act on it. He/she has been filled with a treasure, the beautiful wine, the life which makes the rest of the world sweeter for knowing us. The worldly masters don't quite know where we come from, they don't quite understand, but the servants know. We are filled with the very life of Jesus.