

Sermon - January 11 – Bethlehem & Zion – Curtis Olson

Let's get the college literature major stuff out of the way first.

Some of you know that I am a nurse. Fewer of you probably know that before my degree in nursing, I earned a degree in English literature.

When look at the gospels through the lens of a lit major, you see that the gospel of John is a book apart. Matthew, Mark, and Luke are known as the "synoptic gospels."

While all four gospels tell the story of the life of Jesus, the synoptics share many of the same stories and are thought to come to us from shared sources in their storytelling.

John has some extra stories unseen in the others, skips some of the stories told in the other three, and offers a more philosophical overview of Jesus. While Matthew, Mark, and Luke begin with the birth in Bethlehem, we heard a couple of weeks ago John's more abstract opener.

"In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God. The Word became God. The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us."

John is not just a storyteller. He is a philosopher. He's got style. I'm pretty sure he was a lit major.

John doesn't get into the mechanics of Jesus's baptism, and the way that Jesus recruits his disciples. We don't get the transfiguration in John.

Most of the miracles in the other three books are missing in John. Jesus does do impossible things in this book. John calls them "signs."

The synoptic gospels call Jesus's miracles – in the original (probably mispronounced) Greek: "Dynamis": Miracles. Powers. Abilities. Expressions of the divine powers of Jesus.

John calls Jesus's supernatural events "Semmia": Guideposts pointing toward Jesus's purpose on Earth.

This brings us toward our lectionary reading today: the transformation of water into wine at the wedding in Cana. What is it that THIS event, this miracle, this sign, this semmia, what is it pointing toward?

This must be an important sign to John. This event appears ONLY in John. It is also the FIRST sign described in the gospel of John.

Jesus has not yet begun his public ministry at this time in John's gospel. He has been seen and recognized by John the Baptist as the Word made flesh. He has walked around for a couple of days and gathered five named disciples. And this is the group that arrives at the wedding. (The invitation must have been pretty open: "Jesus of Nazareth...plus five...and your Mom.")

With this miracle, if you are looking for angelic choruses, flashing lights from heaven, and magical flourishes like some magician contestant on "America's Got Talent," you are going to be disappointed.

This is a blink-and-you-miss-it piece of magic.

Imagine, if you will, going to a wedding down the street at the Davey Hall. As the reception moves along, the kegs run dry to foam. The last drop of vodka goes into one last screwdriver. The bar has run out of tequila for the margaritas.

Mary nudges Jesus: "They have run out of wine!" Jesus nudges back: "What has this to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

Oh, No. It's time, kiddo.

Moms...Right?

Jesus's mother points to Jesus and says to the servants "Do whatever he tells you." This is going to be good! (Wink. Nudge.)

You can almost picture Jesus rolling his eyes. "Okay, Mom...."

He tells the servants to fill six large stone jars with water. Then he tells them to draw some off and take it to the master.

And now it's wine! Jesus doesn't TELL anyone this. He doesn't call attention to it. It just...happens. It's a miracle... a "dynamis." Where does this "semmia" point?

What does this transformation tell us about Jesus and his divinity?...about the Word made flesh?

Is there a better way for Jesus, this God, this Word, made flesh, to show that he IS flesh?

What, in our lives, is more human than a wedding? This is as fleshy as it gets.

And Jesus has come to point us to enjoy this life - to celebrate life. This is John's first signpost for us.

This story also points to abundance. The wine will NOT run out. The party will continue. Jesus's ministry on this earth gave gifts to his people in his time, and he will continue to give gifts, now and going forward.

Jesus is not holding back the good stuff. From the comments of the master and the servants, the usual party practice was to START with the good wine. When everyone was intoxicated, and maybe a little less discriminating, then the CHEAP stuff comes out.

Not here. Whatever you have flowing, Jesus has something better coming out. It gets better.

This is the promise that this first sign points to. Generosity. Celebration. Abundance. Starting good and getting better.

This is the promise. The promise of John. The promise of Jesus. The promise of the Word made flesh.

Stay close. Do what he says. Prepare to be surprised by abundant gifts.

Amen.

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