

EPHIPANY 2
ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH
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THE SAVIOR YOU NEED
(John 2:1-11)

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and from Christ Jesus, our Savior. Amen.

In the fallen state of the human condition, we are all susceptible to a shared delusion – the misguided belief that the next stage of life, the next chapter, the next milestone will usher in an improvement in our circumstances and even an elevation of our own moral character. We only tend to be disabused of this delusion after we get toward the end when the only milestone left is the grave. We witness this delusion in the eager eyes of high school seniors on the brink of graduation or in the anticipation of a young couple approaching their wedding day or in the joyful expectation preceding the birth of their first child. It also echoes in the hopefulness that comes with purchasing a new home, the relocation to a different city, and the start of a new and higher paying job. Even as retirement approaches, that persistent delusion whispers in the ears of our minds and hearts: Finally, everything will be just right, and you will be so much more than what you have been so far.

In approaching these milestone events with such thoughts, we unwittingly elevate them to the level of saviors, as though they are providing us our freedom, redeeming us from our immaturity, rescuing us from the

troubles in our marriages, and, at the core, granting us our happiness. The truth, however, stands in sharp contrast to our delusions. Far from being saviors, these events bring to light the undeniable reality that no matter where we go and what we do, we bring with us our imperfections, our faults, and our selfish inclinations, and so also more troubles.

In light of this reality, our meditation today provides us with true comfort and a genuine hope because it reveals to us the only true Savior. In John 2:1-11 we encounter the narrative of that salvation which is the antidote to our perpetual yearning for something more by revealing to us the Savior we truly need.

(ESV) 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.

At every juncture and turning point in our lives, warning signals, within and without, are shouting at us. Internally, our conscience testifies, while externally, the observations of those close to us reveal our character flaws and negative attitudes. Ignoring these warnings is perilous, as a refusal to acknowledge the harm we cause can strain relationships, and more importantly trying to stand before Christ on the Last Day with a defense of personal improvement during one's life will ring hollow and prove futile.

The truth is that the life milestones we anticipate as opportunities for self-improvement often serve to spotlight the inescapable reality of sin within us. Far from concealing our faults, these events tend to magnify them. The event known as the wedding at Cana serves as a perfect example.

The details of whose wedding it was remain shrouded in mystery. What we do know is that it unfolded in the town of Cana, and the groom, by all indications, wasn't the epitome of reliability. How do we discern this? The absence of wine signals one of two possibilities: either inadequate planning for the guest count or insufficient economic means to provide for his bride, as evidenced by the inability to procure enough wine for the

celebration. Both scenarios were deemed equally undesirable in that culture, serving as a glaring warning to the bride that her expectations might not align with reality. It wasn't just a minor social hiccup; it was a red flag signaling potential disappointment down the road.

The natural tendency of people is to mask uncomfortable truths in order to sidestep the embarrassment that seems inevitable. Mary thus pulls Jesus aside, pointing out the glaring issue – "They have no wine." Essentially, she's urging Jesus to partake in the collective delusion that characterizes human behavior. She desires Him to let the newlyweds persist in the illusion that marriage – at least their marriage – will be the turning point for them and that their lives will now be filled with fruits of love and respect: the husband transformed into an exemplary provider, cherishing his wife as his own flesh, and the wife miraculously altered into an exceptional helper to and admirer of her husband. However, the reality, as experience teaches, is quite different. Mistakes linger as unresolved grievances, evolving into ammunition during arguments and opportunities for resentment.

Jesus, refusing to be ensnared by this delusion, replies to His mother, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." This isn't a disrespectful brush off of His mother but a resolute declaration that His purpose transcends the concealment of humanity's problems beneath the veil of baseless hopes for self-improvement. His divine mission, set by the heavenly Father, isn't about enabling sinners to engage in make-

believe. It's about being the authentic Savior we all desperately need.

Yet, contrary to what we might expect based on His response to His mother, Jesus doesn't simply walk away, allowing the groom's fault to be laid bare and the celebration to conclude disastrously. Quite the opposite! Jesus seizes the moment, using it as an opportunity to further His purpose that transcends the immediate predicament with the lack of wine. His aim? To manifest His glory as the genuine Savior of the world. He doesn't just meet Mary's expectations; He surpasses them, transforming water not merely into wine but into an abundance of superior quality.

Now, don't get tangled in the snare of pondering whether Jesus, through this miracle, is endorsing drunkenness. That's a distraction. The changing of water into wine serves as a profound signal of a different nature. It signifies that Jesus transcends our misguided notions of self-improvement amid life's transitions, offering to us a first glimpse of His glorious mission to be the world's Savior from sin and all its symptoms, manifestations, and consequences. Let's not miss the forest for the trees. This miracle isn't about fermented spirits. It's a prelude to Jesus revealing Himself as the antidote to every flaw to our character and life that is called and truly is sin.

Now, let's apply the significance of this event to ourselves, not treating it merely as a vague point about Jesus' divine purpose or as an occasion in which He

helps a poorly prepared groom. How does it resonate with us? What relevance does it hold for our lives?

Undoubtedly, you've encountered significant milestones where your mind deceived you into thinking about the improvement that such milestones would bring. Whether you've walked down the aisle or not, life has presented pivotal moments, and undoubtedly, there are more to come. What these occasions consistently unveil, provided we heed the warning signs, is our perpetual deficiency – not in wine or earthly necessities, but in righteousness. This section of God's Word illuminates a fundamental truth: in this very lack of righteousness, Jesus stands ever-ready to be your Savior, providing the righteousness you can never generate, not even through a million milestone events.

The wedding miracle at Cana signifies that the one who discerns the signs we often overlook – in our friendships, marriages, occupations, vacations, and even in our worship – is here to rescue us from more than just the embarrassment of our failures. He comes to liberate us from the guilt looming before our God, who demands holiness of us, not a gradual process of self-improvement that never actually happens. The miracle of changing water into wine is a blazing beacon, pointing us to Jesus who is the solution to our sin, not just salvaging us from embarrassment but completely delivering us from the weight of guilt in the eyes of a holy God.

Why, then, did Jesus, in response to Mary, assert that His time had not yet come? Precisely because the ultimate act by which He would emerge as the world's savior was still three years down the road. The wine was just a sign of what He came to do, as were all of His other interactions with those marred by sin and its unavoidable symptoms and consequences. He confronted them with the power that demonstrated Him capable to overcome sin. However, it was only when His designated hour finally did arrive that He would take that sin away by bearing the weight of it all on His righteous body and soul, hanging on the cross where He suffered and died for the world.

There, on the cross, as if bringing his entire ministry full circle, Jesus cries out for that which He had three years earlier provided, saying, "I thirst." In Cana, He had changed water into the finest of wines. Now, setting aside His glory to taste death for us all, He sips wine that had soured, completely downing the cup that the Father had set before Him to drink. In this act, He offers you the most exquisite drink of all, echoing His Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled."

So, for every event you believed would usher in the opportunity for you to do and be better, for every instance when warning signals exposed your inability to enact positive change in your life and in your standing before God, now, in the Sacraments, you find vessels brimming with righteousness. In them Christ extends the entirety of His forgiveness, affirming that "where sin

abounds, grace abounds much more." It will never run out.

If you're still awaiting the next milestone event to act as the savior of your circumstances, you've got it all wrong. The key lies in recognizing, through repentance, that no matter what milestone the Lord allows in your life, your sin and your incapacity for self-improvement persist. It's only then that you'll discover Jesus, true to His promise, ready and willing to furnish you with the finest wine of His righteousness. This substantiates that He is indeed the Savior you desperately need. The transformation doesn't come from external events but from an internal acknowledgment of your own shortcomings and the acceptance of divine grace.

Which means if you still find yourself waiting for the next milestone event to be the savior of your circumstances, then you're still looking for the wrong thing. Instead you should recognize through repentance that no matter what milestone the Lord allows to come in your life, your sin and your inability to improve yourself continues. Then, you will find Jesus, true to His promise, to be present and willing to provide you with the good wine of His righteousness, proving that He is truly the Savior you need. AMEN!