

## Pastor Graham Pfeffer Sermon 19<sup>th</sup> January 2025 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after epiphany

Text John 2:1-11; Isaiah 62: 1-5 *No longer will they call you Deserted or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married. <sup>5</sup> As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.*

Weddings are a beautiful occasion. The bridegroom takes delight in his beautiful bride walking down the aisle towards him in her wedding gown and rejoices that he is the one who will be her husband. The couple to be married are the focus of the invited guests, as they stand hand in hand, before the celebrant with their attendants beside them. The bride and groom give vows of commitment to each other of love and devotion for the rest of their lives.

For those of you who are married, and have been married, what was it like planning for your wedding? Planning for the day when you said 'I do' to the one you delight in and began life together as husband and wife.

As I work with couples preparing for married, planning for the wedding can be stressful. After all there is a lot to think of. Where to get married, choosing the bridal gown, the colour of the bride's attendants dresses, the colour of the groom and his attendant's suits. Where to have the reception and the meal plan. Who will you hire to remember this special day. On top of that, there is the guest list. The expectations of each of you as a couple, the parents, of who will be invited. Even though you would like to invite some people to attend, it blows out the numbers to cater for. So, getting married, becomes much bigger than simply being, a groom taking delight in his bride and rejoicing over her.

A wedding is the scene of the first sign of Jesus in the Gospel of John. It is a rather odd wedding story when we view it from weddings we are accustomed with. The focus is not on the bride and groom. The ceremony seems to have already happened. The bride is never mentioned, and the groom makes only a brief appearance with no spoken part at all.

Within the context of Jewish customs, weddings were significant social events that often lasted several days, bringing together families and communities. Wine played a crucial role in festivities, signifying joy and abundance. Running out of wine would have brought embarrassment to the hosts.

In John 2:1-3 we read; *On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, <sup>2</sup> and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup> When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."*

Jesus replies, <sup>4</sup> "Woman, what have you to do with me?" "My hour has not yet come."

That sounds rude or disrespectful, doesn't it. As a mother how would you react if your son spoke to you like that? Yet Jesus addressed his mother in the same way on the cross, where he said, "Woman, behold your son!" There they were words of love and compassion, that his mother would be cared for by John.

An important detail in this first sign of Jesus' public ministry in the Gospel of John, is that his mother is present. Though the mother of Jesus is never named, never called Mary in John's Gospel. She is always spoken of by her relationship to Jesus. For instance, in today's reading, she is referred to as Jesus' mother.

We are told, Jesus' mother simply tells the servants at the wedding, "Do whatever he tells you to do."

Jesus sees the six stone jars standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus simply said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. Then Jesus said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast."

There was no prayer, no word of command, Jesus did not even taste it afterward to see if it had happened. He simply said, "Take it to the steward of the feast." The water simply became wine. Upon tasting it, the steward or the one we call the master of ceremonies, called the bride groom and said to him, everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

In verse 11, we read, *"What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."*

So, what is teaching through this sign that we may believe in him?

The wedding is a rich image in Jewish tradition, pointing to the time of God's deliverance and blessing for Israel, where No longer will they call you Deserted, or name your land Desolate. But you will be called Hephzibah, for the Lord will delight in you, and your land Beulah, which means married.

In this first sign of Jesus, God reveals a new identity, in the relationship between God and Jerusalem. This relationship is as intimate as that between bride and bridegroom, where upon being married, there is a new beginning in which new identity and experience are nurtured as husband and wife. The bride's desire and love are for the groom and the groom's affection and love are for the bride. "Desolate" is changed to *Beulah* ("Married"), a name change that also signifies deep connection and love.

That's what we have in Jesus. Jesus is referred to as the bridegroom who loves his bride the church. Who is the church? All who are gathered in his name. Therefore, in this sign at wedding at Cana, Jesus reveals you are forsaken no more, for Jesus says of his bride the church, she will be called *Hepzibah*, for "My Delight is in her.

*Isaiah prophesied, As a young man marries a young woman, so will your Builder marry you; as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.*

God rejoices over you and rebuilds his relationship with you through his Son Jesus. Last week we celebrated Jesus' baptism and what it means for us. In baptism, you are given a new name. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, God rejoices over you.

Jesus' turning water into wine reveals the abundant grace of God's love and desire for his people. Six water jars each 20-30 gallons used for ritual purification, now filled to the brim, with the best wine. Those wedding guests tasted abundant grace. What does grace taste like? Like the best wine when you are expecting the cheap stuff.

Have you tasted and experienced God's grace? We certainly taste God's grace in Holy Communion, but what about in your everyday life. Have you taken notice of how Jesus delights in you? After all, for those of you who are married, marriage is a daily relationship of taking delight in and rejoicing over your spouse. Every day is a new day to appreciate the one you're married to.

Remember Jesus delights and rejoices over you daily. He showed his desire and love for you when his hour did come and gave his life on the cross to save you and me. Everyday is a new day for you to appreciate your relationship with Jesus. No stress involved. Because for Jesus it is like a perfect marriage. His perfect unconditional love for you. Know that You are rejoiced over. Amen