

Third Sunday after Epiphany

Ro. 12: 16-22

Jo. 2: 1-11

+In the Name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen+

Recently your Rector wandered through the Atlanta airport seeking something edible if not tasty and palatable. In the process a very well dressed lady, probably in her late 70's and without a doubt Southern by birth from her accent, appeared on the scene. She obviously never met a stranger and corralled an unwary soldier, then a young mother, and finally a business traveler and conducted a monologue with each. Once the flight home had been boarded, places taken, and seat belts buckled, she suddenly materialized, waltzed down the aisle, and took her place immediately behind us. As previously performed, she struck up a conversation with her neighbor. What became noticeable, beside the volume of her voice, was the nonstop barrage of words produced from such a small frame. She went for a good 20 minutes without a pause or seemingly taking a breath. I kept waiting for the oxygen masks to drop from the ceiling before she passed out!! Her seat mate and all in ear shot received the story of her family, her no good son-in-law, her crazy relatives, and all in minute detail. Name after name was presented and described as if the person sitting with her knew everyone of them, even though they were clearly strangers. It was like all of us were simply knowledgeable of these people and their unique personalities and traits, but without any real clues as to the truth. You may well have had such encounters, and were left to fill in the blanks.

St. John's recounting of Jesus' first miracle, the changing of water into wine, has a bit of the same feel to it. If the account is lifted from his Gospel and placed alone, it does not really flow smoothly to modern ears, and there seem to be abrupt changes in the story line. Comments like, "woman, what has this to do with me" followed by "my hour has not yet come" are not really clear. And then suddenly Mary is giving instructions that appear to counter Jesus' disinterest, (he has just told her it is none of her business) and we are left to make jumps and assumptions. These same difficulties would not have been so for readers in John's time. It is the background which makes things clear. Embedded in that background are 2 crucial messages from this story: the **first** is that Jesus' glory, who he really is comes to the forefront, and **second**, the springing forth of belief; faith among the disciples, when they (and we) realize who we are encountering.

Look at some of the images presented here: wedding, water, wine, feast, plenty, and worship. John is telling his readers that in Jesus we are receiving a surpassing replacement of those things that have been held dear in the past. A wedding was long held as a sign of God's connection with his people, and scripture is replete with that, but now Christ is the Bridegroom and we, as the Church, are connected to him as if wedded. Prayer for water, at the feast of Tabernacles, was for washing, drinking, drowning, and purification, but now in Christ there is living water that goes beyond such washing and quinces our thirst for meaning. Israel had believed that the truest worship was in Jerusalem, but now worship of him transcends any boundaries and is for all people. He becomes the true light of the world rather than the feast of Dedications, and while Israel fed on manna in the wilderness, now Jesus becomes the true bread and wine from heaven, which we celebrate every Lord's Day on this altar. All of these stand behind this changing of water into wine at Cana. Who is Jesus, really? John says he is the glory of God in time and space, and it is not the sign itself that is the focus of this story, but the One to which this sign points. The characters in the gospel account are implied to be scurrying about trying hard not to be embarrassed by their

poor planning and the lack of adequate supplies for this all important event. Mary's question to Jesus is a statement that no one expected him or his disciples to show up for the wedding and that is why the wine has become depleted. But beneath that dialogue are 2 looming issues: (1) are our distractions and worries about self-sufficiency, about all the things we deem crucial, (2) preventing us from seeing that Jesus is really enough? Feasts of Lights or of the Tabernacle, water purification rites, and finding manna in the wilderness are not issues of much significance to us. But in the midst of struggling with hurts and hope, death and losses, fears and anxiety we know how terribly lonely it can be to try and find answers in our selves alone. There are moments, even in ordinary days doing ordinary tasks, when we "hit the wall" and find our resources pushed to the limits. We fall back on old reliable patterns of behaving and problem solving, but they seem not quite enough. We think that perhaps when we finish this educational degree we will finally feel satisfied. When I get this new home or relationship I will feel settled and content, or when I finally reach a measure of financial security than all will be right with the world. But underneath it all there is often a gnawing sense that something is still missing and not quite right. These are our feast of the Tabernacle, our manna in the wilderness and they are not really enough. Deep down we are searching and looking for something more satisfying. John is telling us that something is a "some one", who is standing in front of us. In Him the glory of God, that is all of God's power, presence, and all of God's benefits are present. He is willing to take the plain water and empty seeking lives and re-place it with something far more permanent—Himself.

The disciples came to believe this. That is, they came to trust themselves and stand in the world but always with his shadow surrounding them. We call it conversion. St. Benedict, the father of monasticism in the west called his monks to 3 things: stability (perseverance), obedience (listening for God), and constant conversion (seeing ourselves anew in light of God's presence). This is both the journey and destination of the Christian life. It is a living reality every time we come to some decision about our lives. If Christ is the glory of God and we trust Him, our lives are constantly being made over to see more clearly and love more certainly.

A few weeks ago I told you of an event in our community in which a young woman took actions to impact another woman and her 3 homeless children at Christmas. But there is more to that story. For the first young lady doing something at Christmas was not enough. Seeing the impact her actions had made she was simply unwilling to stop at one deed. She developed a whole program which could move to affect the lives of many who are destitute and hurting. First she went to the P.T.O. and met resistance over being asked to extend their charity. Next she went to the principal of the school who while sympathetic was reluctant. So off she went to the school board. Whether out of compassion or the simple realization that they were not going to be rid of her, they are now looking at a new way to provide the love and compassion which God offers each of us. I submit to you that this is conversion of life. It is the consequence of knowing that in Jesus God's glory has been revealed and life **is made different** when we trust and allow that glory to shine in and through us. Who is this man? Epiphany says He is the glory of God and when we are encountered by Him we come to believe in what seems impossible. Amen+

SERMON - THE THIRD SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY – 22 JANUARY 2017
St. John's Anglican Church, Greensboro, North Carolina
Father Mark Menees, D.D.
