

Sermon for the Second Sunday After Epiphany: John 2:1-11

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When I was in college, I had this friend who occasionally had a little too much of the sauce. She wasn't destructive or mean. She didn't make wine her personality nor did she rely on it. She just did this thing a few times a semester, enough that it became somewhat predictable. Every so often, my friend would get a package from some online store she'd never heard of, open it up, and find some ridiculous thing her past self had ordered. She never remembered ordering it, thanks to a glass too many of whatever she was having, but she also was never disappointed. So, funny thing, turns out at the height of my Covid brain fog, I did the same thing. I ordered something online from a shop I've never heard of and promptly forgot I'd done it. Friday, a package arrived, and inside was the most delightful thing my past self could've turned up: a pale green hoodie that zips up to look like a fine-furred frog muppet. It's ridiculous and it's funny and it's an uplifting symptom in a sea of heavy ones. I know it's completely stupid, and left to my wits-about-me devices, I'd likely never order something like this, but I'm so glad I did. It's warm, but not the warmest sweater I own. It fits, even if the sleeves are a teensy bit too short. But it makes me laugh, and God knows I need that. These days, maybe we all need something in our lives that's there just for the fun of it.

I've been wondering about this miracle of Jesus' for a very long time. It's early in Jesus' career, and he's attending a wedding with his momma as his plus-one. His disciples are around, the party is raging, everyone's having a grand old time, except maybe not the servants who are working their tails off to keep the party going. I don't think I need to relay the details too much, this is one of the most well-known miracles in JC's arsenal, right up there with walking on water. But I do think it's helpful to take a step back and ask why? Why this miracle? Of all the things Jesus could do and in all the ways Jesus could do it, why this?

It's notable that Mary has to give him a nudge. It's notable that he doesn't talk to anyone except the servants. It's even notable that he doesn't look for recognition for helping the hosts and the newlyweds save face. I'm sure there are countless sermons about each of these points. On a different day, maybe I'd be interested in exploring that second bit, the part where Jesus' first miracle comes in an exchange only with servants. And cooler still, the servants don't go looking for a second opinion, they give all their attention and trust to Jesus right away. That might be a fine sermon.

But I'm not drawn there today. I'm drawn somewhere else. This miracle doesn't really *do* anything. I mean, yes, water becomes wine, party's saved, Jesus' newly recruited disciples believe in him. Sure. But we're not talking about big stuff here. We're not talking about curing incurable diseases. We're not talking about raising the dead. We're not talking about taking on all the failings of humanity and granting forgiveness for everything to everyone. No, we're talking about saving someone a trip to the liquor store. In the grand scheme of things, that's probably a great way to make a friend or two, but it's not earth-shattering stuff. And that makes me wonder what the point of this story is. Maybe it's better to say, what *a* point of the story *could be*. And you know what? I think it's right there in the question. The point just might be that there isn't a point. Maybe Jesus does this miracle just because it's kinda fun, kinda silly, but also kinda uplifting.

Now, I don't want to discount Jesus or this miracle. I don't know another soul that can pull it off. But think about what this might mean for us if one of Jesus' miracles - his first miracle - is just for the fun of it. Jesus does this amazing thing that, in the twisting design of the universe is unnecessary. Also, he doesn't just provide wine, he provides amazingly good wine, another completely unnecessary detail. It's not earth-shattering stuff, not really, but wow it's enriching. It's not a life of puritanical, self-inflicted denial. It's not exactly all-out hedonism, either. It's just a sort of lovely, treat-yourself approach to being in the world endorsed by the Messiah himself. It just might be that God actually wants us to enjoy ourselves, to take pleasure in small moments and big events, maybe even to forget you ordered an amphibian-inspired sweatshirt online, maybe.

On the surface, I know that might sound a little silly, or for some, maybe even a little heretical. But I don't buy that. I think there's something deep and affirming in a theology that's informed by fulfillment and comfort. To be clear, not one that's 100% about making yourself happy, 'cause that's not quite the same thing. But a theology that holds delight and joy as valuable, even worthy of miracle. Come to think of it, that is earth-shattering. So much of our history has held self-denial or worse at the core of Christianity. I don't buy it. I'm grateful for a God that wants me to enjoy life, enjoy Creation, enjoy what God and other people have to share. I'm grateful for a God that expects me to find joy through miracles, even miracles done for no other purpose than 'cause it's cool. I'm grateful for awe and wonder, and this week, I'm even grateful for the forgetfulness that allowed this surprise to happen.

I know, maybe it's a little goofy. Maybe it's even a stretch to start theologizing over brain fog and a stupid sweatshirt. But maybe there's a gift in all this too, that in searching for God in all things, we might be surprised to find God around, even in unexpected and goofy places. God knows we need that. These days, maybe we all need that something in our lives that's sometimes there just for the fun of it. Even miracle, even God.