

Rev. Danny Mackey
Epiphany 2
January 14, 2018
John 2:1-11
Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church in Muncie, Ind.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

“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.”

One Sunday, years ago, Brenda and I were in church and, as we were sitting in the pew, we had a little girl in front of us, standing up on the cushion and looking every which way. This little girl, I won't ever forget, had this big grin, stretching from ear to ear. And to anyone who would look at her, she would smile upon them. It was a beautiful, radiant smile. It was a smile that said, “I am so very happy, and I want you to be happy too.”

Here this little girl was smiling at me, and I at her, when her mother roughly grabbed her arm, pulled her down, off her feet and onto her seat, and scolded her with a harsh whisper, “Stop smiling. Church isn't for smiling.”

It broke my heart. Why isn't Church for smiling? Was the girl distracting? Of course she was. But was that a bad thing? Not really. Here she was sharing her joy at being in the house of the Lord, gathered among the people of God. And her joy couldn't be contained in anything less than that huge, bright smile.

After all, don't we talk about smiling in our liturgy? Can you think of when it does? It does right at the very end, for sure. “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord look upon you with favor and grant you peace.” His face shining upon you, being gracious to you and looking upon you with favor, is none other than God smiling upon you, much like a dear father looks upon a child with whom he is well pleased. The Divine Service ends with God smiling upon His forgiven and redeemed people.

And so, why do people want to take all the joy out of going to Church? Why do they want to squash the smiles and the laughter? Why do they make Church into something grueling and unappealing? And why do they do it even before they get here, moping along? Every Sunday morning was an ordeal in my house growing up. Yells and screams drove us out of

bed, into the car and onto church. It wasn't fun at all. My Mom would get furious and my Dad would get a headache.

But we went to church because we had to. And once there, the best part of the service was the end, because it was over. We got to go home and the yelling had stopped. We put in our time, like it was some form of self-punishment for our sins the past week. For how many of you is church like that? For how many of you is coming to church an ordeal and a source of frustration? For how many of you is church a cause to frown and to pull out hair and to weep and to gnash teeth instead of a cause to smile?

People do the same thing with weddings. I have joked that the wedding preparations are the final test to see if a couple has the stuff to stay married. A great deal of work goes into planning a wedding. You've also got all the different opinions on what should and shouldn't happen. Invariably, someone other than the bride and groom tries to take over, dictating how things ought to be done. And then you've got to worry about the reception afterwards and if that brother or that cousin will behave him or herself.

People can take all the joy out of weddings. They turn it into work. They make it an obstacle to overcome or a hoop to jump through. It becomes a final test. Or it becomes the first test of a couple's reputation. If the reception is a downer, people won't think the couple has much of a chance. If the bride and groom aren't smiling, trouble is on the horizon.

And that's what almost happens in our Gospel lesson. The smiling bride and groom are faced with a potential disaster: they've run out of wine. Wine and joy go hand in hand in the Bible. No wine; no joy. The celebration would quickly fall apart and come to a screeching halt. The lack of wine would declare that this couple didn't plan accordingly. It'd declare that their marriage would dry up. It would serve to embarrass them—an embarrassment they would have great difficulty overcoming.

At this point, there's nothing the bride or groom could do. In fact, we're not sure that they're even aware of the problem. It's the problems we don't expect that are the most difficult to deal with. But Mary, Jesus' mother, notices the situation. The wedding couple needs a miracle and Mary goes to Jesus to provide one. When she goes to Him, she doesn't doubt His ability to handle the situation. Even after Jesus asks her what's all this got to do with Him, she simply directs the servants to do whatever her son says.

Does Jesus take the joy out of the wedding? Does He refuse to stave off this problem from the unsuspecting couple? Does He frown on them instead of smile? Of course not! Jesus brings joy and pleasure to them and to all at the wedding celebration. And He does so beyond all expectation and need. He has six stone jars, each able to contain 20 to 30 gallons, filled to the brim! The wine flows; the joy surges forth!

Church is a wedding feast. You'll notice in our liturgy that we are participating in the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom, which has no end. And our Lord Jesus provides for us, just as He did that day in Cana, all we need for our joy. He gives to us bread and wine, His very body and His very blood, to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of sins. And the forgiveness of our sins gives us joy. Forgiveness lifts the embarrassment and shame. Forgiveness takes away the guilt. And forgiveness opens the doors to the unending and eternal celebration in heaven. Forgiveness gives ample cause to smile.

And Jesus did this before we were ever aware of the problem. We were unsuspecting of our sin, but Jesus has stepped in and dealt with it. He not only saves the party, but He also saves our souls! Thus we join in the celebration. It's a feast of which we partake to eternal blessedness and joy. It's a celebration of what Jesus has done on the cross and continues to do in His Sacrament.

Church isn't some place we have to go to, to pay for our sins for the week. No, Church is a place we get to go and a place where our sins are forgiven and taken from us. Church isn't some place for frowns and feeling bad about ourselves. No, Church is a place for joy, even the joy that smiles. And God, our heavenly Father, does indeed smile upon us, being gracious to us and looking upon us with favor, because of what Jesus has done for us in His death to our sorrow and His resurrection to our joy.

May each Sunday, each time you enter God's holy house, be a time of joy at knowing that Jesus has indeed saved you. And may you smile—a bright and radiant smile that stretches from ear to ear and declares, "I am so very happy, and I want you to be happy too"—for God smiles upon you.

In Jesus' name.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus + to life everlasting.