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The Second Sunday after Epiphany

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Delight Uncovered

God delivers more than we ask, not less.

When life doesn't deliver the pleasures we long for, it's easy to conclude that a life of pleasure is incompatible with a life with God. This week's Gospel uncovers just the opposite. It uncovers that when Jesus doesn't meet our expectations, it's because those expectations need to be raised rather than lowered. He intervened so that the joy could continue. He acted so that blessings would be multiplied.

Sermon

John 2:1-11

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "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."

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.

Introduction – Sometimes we Lutherans feel a little deprived, don't you think? Like everybody else gets to do the cool stuff except for us. We get into church and they make us confess our sins—like first thing. We have a problem and they tell us to carry our cross. We earn our money and they want it in our envelopes. We're glad to do it, but sometimes we feel a little deprived. Kind of feels like that old children's song, "I'm a lonely little petunia in an onion patch."

It's true enough that the Christian life isn't all light and roses. Job lost his family and his health. Joseph lost his family and his freedom. Cemeteries in the old world are filled with the bones of martyred believers. There are some things we just can't do because we're Christians, some chances we just can't take, some fun we just can't have. We don't really get depressed by this; we kind of shrug our shoulders and expect it. Stay calm and carry on. Seems like Lutherans can catch the gloomy Gus syndrome easy enough.

I wonder if that bridegroom in Cana was feeling some of that. The wedding reception was going strong, the guests were enjoying themselves, his new bride was beaming and laughing—and the wine was gone. There was nothing he could do about it. Maybe he was too poor to buy more. Maybe there were more guests than he planned for. Maybe the winery was closed. Whatever. He was stuck. Head bowed, hands in his pockets, Tears of shame in his eyes. Not the end of the world but he was certainly feeling down and more than a little deprived.

Of course, we all know how this story ends. The Gospel from John chapter 2 informs us that **Jesus and his disciples had been invited to the wedding.** Jesus solved the problem. He made wine out of water. It was all good—the wedding and the wine. That groom in Cana could never have imagined this. His smile was back, the guests were happy, and his bride was beaming. Delight beyond his dreams.

The truth is we never have to feel deprived when we have Jesus. Never have to feel like we're missing something. Never have to lower our shoulders and just take it. Life for us is more than just keeping calm and carrying on. With Jesus we have

Delight beyond Our Dreams

We'll see this in the Gospel as Jesus brought joy to a wedding and as he brings joy to a marriage.

1. So we know the problem in Cana. Jewish wedding receptions usually lasted a week. There's no idea here that people were drinking too much. Jesus wouldn't have stayed if people were getting drunk. At the end of the week the groom processed his bride to their new home. So running out of wine kind of ruined the grand finale.

Jesus' mother Mary was there; she saw the problem and felt the sympathy: **When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."** Jesus put her off a little (I'll talk about that later) but Mary wasn't worried. **His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."** So what happened next is pretty simple. **Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.** They washed their hands in this water and they purified kettles and plates. This water wasn't straight out of the well. **Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.** Filled with more well water right up to the top. Then Jesus told them, **"Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."** **They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from.** The bar manager assumed this was a new batch of wine. John tells us that **the servants who had drawn the water knew.** He took a taste, ready to frown and pucker a little. But this was excellent, best wine he had ever tasted. **Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "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."** It's hard to imagine what the groom thought right at that moment. A social disaster averted! A product to please the most sophisticated palate. Hundreds of bottles for his wine cellar after the wedding was over. And a happy wife makes for a happy life! More than he could have ever dreamed. Delightful!

I've heard a few Lutheran fathers say (usually with a smile) that they wish Jesus had shown up at their daughter's wedding—would have saved on the bar bill. But Jesus isn't interested in bar bills; even at Cana the wine wasn't his first priority. Jesus cares more about our souls than our thirst. But this miracle—the first one Jesus performed—reminds us that Jesus does care about making us happy. So when those times come when you're feeling a little deprived because you're a Christian, remember the look on your wife's face when you asked her to marry you. Remember the first time you held your newborn in your arms. Think back to your baby's first smile or first step or first word. How about the first bucket he made or the first home run he hit? Or the day she walked down the aisle at her wedding. Think about the roses that bloom in your garden or the bumper crop that grows in your fields. Or seeing the sun rise or seeing it set with someone you love. Sometimes it's just delight beyond our dreams. Jesus brought joy to a wedding with nothing more than wine. And Jesus brings joys to our lives in just as many little ways. We're not deprived. Jesus would tell us: Enjoy the moments and smile a little.

2. When Jesus came to the wedding at Cana, he knew exactly what he was going to do, and making wine wasn't his priority. He brought along six young men who had started to follow him just a few days before. He was starting to break them in, starting to share what he would be doing and what they would be doing for the rest of their lives. When he told his mother, **My hour has not yet come,** he wanted her to know that her interests and his interests weren't the same. John tells us what Jesus' interests were: **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.** And that's why Jesus turned water into wine.

So what glory did Jesus want to reveal? John isn't specific here, but Isaiah tells us in the First Reading for today. Isaiah was describing how God would restore the dignity and destiny of his Old Testament people. After years of deprivation and defeat, God would intervene: **No longer will they call you Deserted or name your land Desolate.** Isaiah explains the Lord's glory with the picture of marriage: **The LORD will take delight in you, and your land will be married. 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.** Of course, Isaiah was looking beyond Jerusalem's restoration. The marriage he could see was our redemption.

The Holy Spirit uses dozens of different pictures in the Bible to explain Jesus' work. Marriage is one of them. When Paul describes the love a husband has for his wife, he compared marriage to the Church and he compared husbands to Christ. **Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.** You and I have to deal with what we are without Christ. None of it's nice; we don't like to talk about it, but it's very real. Without Jesus we are abandoned by God because of our sins. We are not holy as God demands. In his sight we are filthy, dark, stained, wrinkled, and pimped. Look, you don't worry about getting more wine until you run out. And we don't really think about Christ until we face up to what we are without him. Being deprived of fun isn't even close to being deserted by God.

The glory that Jesus planned to show his disciples is that he takes us, you and me, ugly and dirty and wart-covered as we were—he takes us to be his own bride. He lived, he died, he rose again to get rid of our sins and to make us drop dead gorgeous in the sight of God. And now he gives us delights we could never dream of: The pleasure of falling to sleep at night without being afraid of a whole day's worth of sins; the contentment of praying and knowing Jesus is listening and answering; the thrill of helping others by giving ourselves to them; the fun of looking into the future and knowing what's coming. To experience the happiness of Jesus smiling face over breakfast, the joy of walking with him hand in hand, the pleasure of his loving arms, and the comfort that comes when he holds us close in tough times—These are the joys that come with our marriage to Christ. Jesus the groom, we the bride and delight beyond our dreams.

Deprived of what! Nothing! Jesus cares enough to give us the little joys of life, just as he did at a wedding at Cana. And Jesus loves us enough to give us the greater joys of life as we connect to him in the marriage of faith. A simple story about a wedding in Cana, but **these are written that we might believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name.** Amen.