

## **Sermon, Father William J. Albinger**

**Sunday January 17, 2010**

Epiphany 2C 2010

(Sermon delivered by notes. This is a reconstruction)

In the Name of our one ever creating, ever loving, ever sustaining God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

In today's Gospel we get to see a very human Jesus at the start of his ministry. He's a 30 year old guy tagging along with his mother to a wedding being held in Cana, a small village about 9 miles from his home in Nazareth. He's at a party with lots of eating and drinking and dancing. Weddings were very festive get-togethers.

But weddings in Jesus' time were different from today's weddings. We do a lot of weddings here on Maui so we know the drill – the limos, caterers, flowers, videographers, musicians. \$50,000 and five hours later and the whole thing is over! In Jesus' times it was more home spun – the women made the dresses, fixed up the house, did the cooking and the men, well I guess they were there encouraging the women. The whole village and all relatives were invited. People walked for miles to get there. The party lasted for days and it involved the whole community. Weddings involved a family's status and reputation so you would call in all your chits to get the help needed to pull off a good party.

But at this wedding the worst thing possible happened – the wine ran out! That would kill the party and the family's reputation. ! Mary saw what happened and pointed the problem out to Jesus. We don't know what she thought he could do or why she thought he could help. But she goes to her son and presents the facts.

Jesus' initial response sounds familiar and is all too common: "What does that have to

do with you and me?” His second sounds self-involved: “My time has not yet come.” Mary’s response is also very human. She probably shoots him a look only a mother can give and leaves him with the problem, telling the servants, “Do whatever he tells you to do!”

Jesus really low keys his answer. He tells the servants to fill up the six large stone purification jugs up to the brim and then tells them to take a ladle from them to the chief steward for him to taste. The chief steward finds it better than the wine first served.

A lot of commentators get hung up on the miracle aspect of this lesson – but I’m not going to go there. I am old enough to remember a lot of self-evident truths from my youth turning out to be wrong (e.g. worry causes ulcers when it is actually a bacteria; African-Americans aren’t ready for full freedom, etc). I also remember things that seemed impossible science fiction become realities. Remember Dick Tracey’s wristwatch walkie-talkie? How about this? – pulling out and holding up my iPhone - want to check the markets, watch a movie, get directions home, read a book? No, I’ve seen enough self-evident truth prove to be false and enough impossibilities become realities to keep an open (even if sometimes skeptical) mind.

Miracles are signs in John’s Gospel. Signs in themselves don’t carry much significance. What is important is what they signify! What is the meaning they point to? Here John is pointing out that Jesus has power over nature (a divine attribute) and the ability to make fundamental changes to reality as we know it. He has the power to change the status of things and people. The jars used were meant to hold water for religious purification – to cleanse people from ritual impurity before they ate and blessed God. Here they now hold wine in extravagant abundance to celebrate new life and changed relationships! The extravagance only adds to the meaning – That’s about 180 gallons of wine or about 720 liter bottles! This points to God’s generosity when addressing our needs

What about us? When have we asked God for something and have been overwhelmed by the response? What do we need to ask for now? Jesus also complained to his mother about the timing of her request. His time was not now. We don’t know what Jesus thought the start of his

time should be like, but we do know what Mary thought of that excuse. Maybe it was from Mary that he learned compassion, - the need to respond to human need. It was simple human need to be spared disgrace and some needling by his Mother that kicked started Jesus' ministry.

The first sign was at an unimportant wedding of unimportant people in a hick town. No one even knew of the miracle other than the disciples with him and the servants who filled the jugs. God is found in the ordinary – at a simple wedding solving a common human problem. God works in and through us. When has God showed up unexpectedly in your lives? What in hindsight turned out to be the best thing that ever happened to you?

To ask and answer questions like that requires us to expand our view of what is possible and to have the courage to ask it. God in Jesus is calling us into a new relationship with God and is giving us a new identity. No, God isn't room service to give us our every dream. But the biblical truth –and it is a great biblical truth – is that God is calling us into a new relationship and offering us a new identity. Just like our Old Testament lesson was about God changed the status of the ancient Israelites and married them – thus changing their status from rejected and reviled to beloved, God offers us a new and different identity in Jesus. In baptism, Jesus took us on – took us into himself. Jesus in baptism offers the identity of Child of God. And it doesn't get much better than that.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose holiday we celebrate tomorrow, knew this truth and knew that we are given this status so that we in turn give it to others. We are blessed only to bless. I can imagine the names he was called in his life. I can only imagine the disrespect and oppression he suffered. But he never forgot that he was called Child of God. That enabled him to change the world and make each and every one of us a better person.

Amen.