

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text this morning is from John's Gospel. *"Jesus did this the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."*

At the wedding feast in Cana, Jesus saves the party by turning water into wine. Some call this a miracle; John prefers to call it a sign. *"Sign, sign everywhere a sign, blocking out the scenery breaking my mind"* sang The Five Man Electrical Band way back in 1970. As was true then, we remain awash in signs. Billboards, T shirts, bumperstickers--- there are signs everywhere. A sign is supposed to be something that points to another reality.

Some signs are universal:

(Red light) We see this sign and we should stop. If we do not stop, there is a good chance we will get clobbered.

(Green light) We see this sign and we should go. If we do not go, we will soon hear a honking sound coming from behind us, and if we look in our rear view mirror, we may see some flamboyant gestures.

Some signs are a bit more ambiguous. (Yellow light) Okay, how many of you see this as a sign that you should slow down? How many see it as a sign you should speed up?

Some signs are confusing (opened/closed). I imagine this restaurant does not do much business.

Some signs are just plain old stupid. (No signs sign)

There are times when signs can send mixed messages. It occurred to me after Rabbi Berman was here Wednesday night, that the cross, the deepest and dearest symbol we Christians have, can be for a Jew, something all together different. What we see as a sign of God's unconditional love for all of humanity can be seen by European Jews as a symbol of centuries of church sanctioned persecution. Signs are not always very clear.

It is not self evidently clear what is going on in Cana of Galilee at that wedding Jesus attends along with his mother Mary. We know that Jewish weddings in the 1st century would last for days, or as long as a week. We know that the wine is running out, and that would be a sign of dishonor for this Jewish family—a major disaster. Then things get murky.

Mary notices the wine is running out. She seems to instruct her son to do something about it. Jesus appears to brush her off. “It’s not my problem.” Mary seems to say, “Oh yes it is.” The next words out of her mouth are, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Standing in the corner are six large stone jars which can hold between 120 and 180 gallons of water. The water is to be used for the Jewish rite of purification. As people enter the wedding they will dip their hands into the water and ritually purify themselves, a sign that they are ready to take part in this sacred event.

Jesus tells the servants “*Fill the jars with water.*” They fill them to the brim. He tells them, “*Now draw some out.*” They draw some out. He says, “*Now take it to the chief*

steward.” He takes a sip and smiles. The wedding servants wink at each other and chuckle.

The chief steward calls over the groom and says, “*You dog, you! You saved the best wine for the last!*” The groom is clueless. All he knows that he is now host to the biggest bash that has hit Cana in years.

“Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed him.”

How many people were at that wedding, 50, a hundred? Only a hand full knew what had happened. Mary knows. She instigated the whole thing. Jesus’ disciples apparently know, because they end up “believing in” Jesus. And the servants at the wedding are clued in--- they poured in water and out came wine. But that is all.

The bride and groom are blissfully unaware. The wedding guests are now too drunk to care and the chief steward thinks he is working with a guy who really knows how to treat his friends well. Signs, you see, are not always clear, even when they come straight from the Lord.

And this can make talking about faith maddening.

The first sermon I ever preached in front of real live people occurred on the weekend the Berlin Wall came down in 1989. I was young a starry eyed seminarian, believing God's actions were self-evident. I said in my sermon that the wall's coming down was a sure sign of God's presence and power to bring together the world's people and heal decades of brokenness. One man who patiently listened to the sermon told me as he left, "*The wall's coming down might have nothing at all to do with*

God. Capitalism,” he said, *“is quite simply, a better economic system than communism.”* I saw the hand of God at work. He saw the hand of the free market.

Some things that happen to us or around us, we are sure, are signs for faith. We witness a person held in the grip of addiction set free and become sober. We may see it as a demonstration of God’s grace at work in her life. Someone else might see only a very good drug and alcohol counselor.

We witness a beautiful work of nature, a dramatic sunset. We may see testimony to the wondrous creativity of our maker. Someone else might comment on how the molecules of air and dust configured in such a way as to refract the sun’s light in an eye pleasing matter. I may not

want to go and have a beer with this person, but you get my point.

Jesus turns water into wine at a wedding. Some see it as a definite sign pointing to the reality that Jesus is the Son of God who can transform a dismal, dreary world into abundant life. For others it was just one heck of a wedding, one they will be talking about in Cana for years.

It is strange how it works.

Once, in my previous congregation we had just buried two beloved members and a third one had just died two days before. It was a very sad time for our church. A group of ladies were next door in the parish hall preparing for another funeral luncheon. I was in my office at the church writing another funeral sermon.

I heard the door burst open, and in rushed Patsy from next door, in a fit of excitement. “*Pastor, get over here right now. We need you to see this.*” My heart raced. Was the drain clogged? A dead mouse? A stain on the new carpet?

I was stunned when I saw it. Strategically centered on the floor of the hall was a cross, brilliantly illuminated with every color of the spectrum. For that was what it was, a cross-shaped spectrum of light beamed straight through the corner window. How did it happen that on a February morning, a beam of light traveled 93 million miles from the Sun to our little corner of the world through that corner window at the precise angle needed to display for all of our saddened eyes to see shimmering on the carpet, a sign of God’s love and care? I still wonder about that.

The world is God's stage. Every atom of it is loaded with possibility and promise, every nook and cranny of creation is seeded with potential signs of divine care. If you stop to think about it, we witness God's continuing creativity every day; though much of the time we do not know it, or we are simply too busy to see it. C.S. Lewis claimed that the signs and wonders of Jesus were the same divine creativity performed at a different speed and on a smaller scale.

Jesus turned water in to wine at Cana. God does that all of the time. Rains from the sky water the earth below and the sun ripen grapes until they burst with juice. We do not usually refer to a nice bottle of Pinot Nior as a sign for faith. May be we should. As Lewis said, "*When Jesus turned*

water into wine at Cana; a number of people saw this as a sign that something mighty was afoot in the world.”

I know it is hard to hear this sermon and at the same time witness the excruciating pain of the survivors in the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake. The death and suffering found there are too much for our senses to bear and the unfairness of such a disaster on an already destitute country screams for an answer.

I have none that would be adequate.

Some would call this a sign too. The same people who once described Hurricane Katrina as a sign of God's judgement, are now also calling the Haitian catastrophe a sign, not of the loving, benevolent God in whom we trust, and whom Christ reveals, but of an angry, unforgiving

despot whose rigidness seems to resemble his most closest admirers. As I said, signs are slippery things. They can uncover both the best and the worst in us.

I am convinced that even in Haiti this morning, in the midst of untold carnage and misery there are signs to be seen. Never crystal clear, never self-evident, but signs for faith and hope in a God, who in Christ, who stands with the people of Haiti and those who try to help them. May we ourselves now be Christ's hands and feet, signs of God's love. Amen.