



ST. STEPHEN'S ANGLICAN CHURCH

11856 MAYS CHAPEL RD., TIMONIUM, MD 21093

The Third Sunday After The Epiphany, January 27th, 2013

**¤ In The Name of The Father and of The Son
and of The Holy Ghost. Amen. ¤**

Have you ever wondered why Jesus chose to inaugurate his ministry here on earth by turning water into wine to bail out a pair of embarrassed newly weds? It used to puzzle me a lot. If I were the Son of God, I would have done something a lot more spectacular.

I would have raised somebody from the dead -- or at the very least I would have cured a whole load of people of truly horrific diseases. I couldn't help but think that when he changed the water into wine, Jesus wasted a golden opportunity to demonstrate the limitless nature of his power.

Theologians frequently talk about the miracle at Cana as prefiguring the institution of the Eucharist – the Holy Communion. And it is true: You can certainly see that in it. What's more, if Jesus can turn water into wine in industrial quantities, it is proof positive that he can turn the much more modest quantity of bread, wine and water we put on the altar into his body and blood.

But, actually, there is much more to the miracle than that. In truth, it was precisely the right miracle with which to start the Son of God's earthly ministry. This goes without saying, of course. The very idea that our all knowing, eternal God would make a hash of things is quite outlandish. But in fact nothing demonstrates God's deep and abiding love for mankind than this kindly act to save a young couple from a serious embarrassment on their wedding day.

If God were willing to use his limitless power to do something as unimportant as saving the face of

a bridegroom who had stupidly failed to get the drinks order for his wedding party right, what would he not do for us? The answer to that question came just three years later, of course, when he offered himself as a sacrifice on the cross to save us from the consequences of being all too human. The miracle at the wedding at Cana is a graphic illustration of just how much God loves the world.

But if the miracle at the wedding at Cana is a concrete demonstration of the depth of God's love for us, what does it tell us about our reactions to him? I suppose the amazement of the master of ceremonies at the perfection of God's work – the quite superlative quality of the wine – might tell us something. But, actually, St. John really mentions nothing about the way the wedding guests reacted to the miracle.

Certainly he doesn't say that any of them ultimately became Christians as a result of the experience. Yet the event must have been one of the most memorable things that had happened to any of them. How many folks at a modern wedding would forget if one of the guests conjured half a truckload of champagne and single malt Scotch whisky out of thin air? Relatively few, I'd guess. So why did this most memorable event seem to have so little lasting effect?

The same question might be asked of all of the other thousands of miracles Jesus performed. What lasting effect did any of these wonders have on the hearts and minds of the witnesses and beneficiaries? Many, no doubt, cheered Jesus into

the Holy City on Palm Sunday, but most of them also bayed for his blood on Good Friday. Certainly significantly fewer were there to greet the risen Christ.

If you find this strange, think on Jesus' words when a group of students of Jewish law and Pharisees asked Jesus to prove himself by performing a miracle for them. "An evil and adulterous generation asks for a sign and no sign shall be given it but the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah spent three days in the belly of a whale so the Son of Man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Jesus was referring to his death and resurrection. But it's important to remember than many of those who witnessed Jesus raise the widow's son at the city of Nain and the raising of Lazarus nevertheless deserted him – just as many of those who saw the empty tomb ignored the evidence of their own eyes.

As a youngster, I found such things shocking. I knew modern Christians wouldn't have been like that. I knew we would have stood shoulder to shoulder with Jesus all the way. I knew that we wouldn't have been like Peter and denied the Son of God in his hour of need. Today I know differently. Human beings readily rationalize away discomforting and disturbing happenings. And miracles are certainly discomforting and disturbing.

Today many folks seem to assume that miracles only happened in the "Olden Days" That, however, is far from true. Miracles take place quite regularly. But from the perspective of the 21st Century miracles are no longer so important for demonstrating Jesus' divine authority. You can see his influence working in the history of both the Church and the world to which has taken Christ's Gospel. Consider Jesus' achievements by today's modern American business standards.

Ask Henry Ford or Andrew Carnegie or John D. Rockefeller Sr. what has been Jesus' most significant earthly achievement. It's unlikely they'd refer to any miracle, not even his virgin birth, resurrection or ascension. Certainly, they wouldn't bother to mention changing water into wine at the wedding at Cana.

By their standards, the great capitalists would single out the creation of the Church and the dissemination of the Gospel through out the world as Jesus' most significant earthly accomplishment here on earth.

Today we tend to take the Church for granted. It's been around for two millennia – and during that time the gospel it preaches has laid the foundation for our entire civilization – framing society; shaping our thoughts and aspirations.

Consider what was involved in spreading the Gospel throughout the world; not least how swiftly it was accomplished. Within a decade of the Crucifixion, the faith had spread throughout the Roman Empire – that's tantamount to saying the whole of the known world.

Within 20 years of the Crucifixion, the faith was exerting such an influence, the Emperor took the first step towards persecution. To eradicate the influence of the Christian Gospel, he expelled all Jews from Rome. (Back then, Christianity was considered a Jewish sect.)

But within 30 years of the Crucifixion, Christianity not only had its own separate identity, it was thought to pose such a serious threat to the empire that a full scale efforts was under way to stamp it out completely. Not only were Christian leaders automatically arrested and sentenced to death, but little people were treated in the same manner.

The subversive nature of Christianity terrified Rome's political masters, and still strikes fear in the hearts of all totalitarians: Christians teach that God is perfect love, as well as perfectly good and perfectly just. He holds all of us to absolute standards of goodness and righteousness.

"Repay no one evil for evil," Read's today's epistle: "Live peaceably with all men . . . Do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath . . . If your enemy hungers, feed him; If he thirsts give him a drink . . . Do not overcome evil by evil, but overcome evil with good."

The Romans tried it and discovered it worked. What's more, when it's tried it will work today. Everlasting life starts here on earth, and the history of the past two millennia shows it is the Gospel is that makes earthly life worth living. *AMEN.*