

January 16, 2022

Second Sunday After the Epiphany

“How He is Made Manifest”

John 2:1-11

I'd like to begin simply by defining the word “manifest” because it's a word that's not so commonly used anymore. “Manifest” means to be seen, be clearly shown, maybe to be understood and recognized.

I clarified that simply because of how the water-to-wine miracle at Cana account ends: *“This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”*

It's a rather strange statement by St. John because, did Jesus really manifest His glory there? No doubt this miracle defies the laws of physics, alters the creation and is a fully divine work. But in the end it just means the wedding feast went on as planned and folks were able to keep partying. Nothing has fundamentally been changed. John says the disciples believed in Him, but I've really got to wonder what it was they believed about Jesus as they sat around drinking the best wine they'd ever taste. But it's true that the miracle points to Jesus being the Son of God and in that manifests a glory yet to be fully revealed.

I say this because of Jesus's response to His mother's statement that *“They have no wine.”* Jesus's reply is *“Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”* Jesus's words distance Himself from the situation. I'm sure Jesus knows that He is going to address the immediate wine problem with the miracle, but He seems to be stepping back and making clear that this is not the hour in which His glory is truly made manifest.

But that's how John's Gospel account rolls. The six “signs” in John's Gospel are all pointing forward to the place and time when Jesus says *“The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified”*; the evening He will celebrate a final Passover meal with His disciples and then head to His arrest, torture and crucifixion. Jesus's true glory is made manifest as He is lifted up on the cross and accomplishes the task for which He came into humanity—to make atonement for humanity's sin.

So John says Jesus first manifests His glory turning water into wine in Cana, yet Jesus is pretty clear that the hour in which He truly is glorified is at Golgotha. It's not really a contradiction because this first manifestation is a foreshadowing of the glory yet to come, but it did get me pondering the question; where do we perceive Christ glory being made manifest in our lives? I think we often perceive Christ's glory, or at least what we think is His greater glory, in some very wrong places.

You know what I think would be glorious; what would make me rejoice to God our Savior with praise and thanksgiving? If suddenly the church insurance company called me and said they all the roadblocks are gone and then the contractors showed up and got to work putting our building back together! That would be glorious! I kid you not, that would probably bring me to tears and screaming “Thank you Jesus!”

Is that where Christ is glorified? Well, yeah, to some degree. But is that where I should be perceiving His greatest glory and be moved deeply to tears, praise and thanksgiving? Not really. But that's where the world is sticking it to me right now, and that's where I'm wrongly perceiving He can be my greatest good and blessing.

You see what I'm getting at? There are a lot of folks who claim to be Christians not in church right now, haven't been in weeks, months or years. Life has been relatively good for a while and that's where they see God manifesting His glory—the good life here and now. Others maybe have had it pretty tough and they're not here because they don't perceive God's glory—because they're looking for it in the good life here and now and they aren't finding it.

Folks hear this story of the wedding at Cana and they think Jesus manifests His glory in making the wine, the party, the good times. Cana isn't pointing to itself. It's pointing to the cross.

Other “signs” in John’s Gospel are healings and even raising from the dead. Jesus manifests His glory in these, but again only because they point to the healing from sin, the resurrection from eternal death that flow from His cross and empty tomb. Yet lots of folks perceive that the greatest manifestation of God’s glory would be in the healing of their disease, poverty and affliction, and don’t look beyond that to the true glory of forgiveness and salvation; to the glory manifested on the cross.

Others make the horrible move of finding the glory of God in their own righteousness, obedience, morality and piety. Such a silly move. It’s really just attributing God’s glory to one’s self; not realizing your own fallenness and finding Christ’s glory in sins taken away.

Likewise others can’t see beyond their own fallenness. They rightly perceive the horrible, evil sinner that they are but despair, unable to perceive the cross where all those sins were brought to nothing by the glorified Jesus.

It seems like a strange place in the Bible to go, but in your life situations of prosperity and want, sickness and health, contentment and frustration, self righteousness and sin—when you consider where Jesus is at in the midst of it, this story of Cana and what Jesus says is a great place to reference.

Hear Jesus saying to you, *“What does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”*

These words can reorient you. It works for me. In the midst of my being ghosted by our insurance company and contractors, in frustration I go to Jesus and hear Him say, *“What does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”* That forces me to think about what it is Jesus accomplished when His hour did come. He took away my sins. He made me right with God. He took away all my enemies and gave me perfect, eternal life. He is glorious to me. And His glory calms my fears and puts things in perspective.

Might He still make me some water into wine, help in this hurricane reconstruction mess if I ask Him? Sure. He might, so I ask. But I do so seeing beyond the wreckage to the promise of the cross.

If you’re living the good life without need of Jesus, or the needy life thinking He isn’t taking care of you: *“What does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”* This reminds you of Jesus’ true mission that is of paramount importance. It’s not to fill your earthly wants and needs—it’s to save you from this world and its inevitable passing away.

If you’re ill, afflicted, even if you’re dying, hear Jesus words: *“What does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”* In that remember what was taken away from you in the hour when Jesus manifested His glory on the cross: He defeated the death that threatens you and gave you victory over it into eternity!

If you ever proudly think you’re doing pretty well in God’s eyes, really hear those words, *“What does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”* Realize that your good works are nothing apart from Christ have no glory or honor but stand damned forever.

And especially, especially if your sins plague you with guilt and you cannot see how a miserable lowlife such as yourself can be received by a holy God, hear Jesus: *“What does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”* Be reminded that when the hour did come, your sins had everything to do with Jesus—He wore them in His own flesh and His death dragged them out from under the face of God and into His tomb, paid for in full and, in that blessed work, His glory was indeed made manifest personally for you.

God is good to us; better than our deeds deserve. So I guess it is kind of glorious that He provides for us in many ways made manifest in this life. He does deign to give us those “best wine” earthly blessings in a lot of ways. But don’t get too caught up in all that. It all points to His love for us which is truly manifested always and only on the cross and through the tomb.

Whatever goodness or challenge you face each day, remember why Christ came...and where He is bringing us. Glory in the manifestation of His glory—the sacrifice He made to claim you as His own. Amen.