



SERMONS THAT WORK

Epiphany 2

Jesus' Hour

[RCL] Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

In this charming and exhilarating story, Jesus is the protagonist but says very little – only three short sentences – yet the whole story is filled with the light of his Epiphany.

The account unfolds before us as images instead of narration. A wedding celebration is taking place and, as was the custom, the wedding is part of a feast. This is obviously a well-to-do family, perhaps the leading family in Cana, a small Galilean village. The first things the writer tells us is that Jesus' mother is present at this joyous affair. Mary must have been a good friend of the bride's family, and since the feast is given by the bride's father, she is an invited guest; later, the bridegroom will take the new bride away from her family and she will belong to his family from then on. So here we are presented with the picture of a wealthy family entertaining the people of the village together with some special friends such as Mary of Nazareth from another village. As a result, the father must have invited Mary's son also, already on his way to becoming famous in the vicinity. But not quite yet. Jesus comes to the feast together with the new friends he has very recently called to himself, the group that will come to be known as his disciples.

The party must have been unfolding with much good cheer since they quickly ran out of wine. And now something very strange is recorded. The hosts run out of wine, but it is the mother of Jesus who goes to her own son and reports this: "They have run out of wine." She doesn't ask for anything, but the "do something about it" seems to be implied, because Jesus understands much more than she says. "Why should that concern us?" Jesus asks her. More specifically, he asks, "Why should it concern you and me?" And then his next sentence reveals that his mother indeed is not just informing him; she is asking much more of him than just giving a report on the state of the feast. For he says, "My hour has not yet come." These words, to those of us who know the story and have read John's gospel, bring chills up and down the spine. "My hour has not yet come." This sentence, in various forms and on different occasions, will be repeated by the writer John six more times, each one rising in drama until the last one leads to his death. "My hour has now come."

Why does he say, "My hour has not yet come," to his mother at this time? What has she already seen in her son that makes her sure that he can affect the production of wine? What happened during the previous 30 years that made this expectation for her, his mother, natural? This child of hers who had arrived under

such dramatic predictions and such heavenly presences, had chosen to stay with the family for a very long time, as children did in those years. But now something is changing and she knows it. John doesn't mention anything about Jesus' birth in his gospel, so when he records the words of this event, we are beginning to assume that the mother does know something that shall soon be revealed to the rest of us.

She doesn't take Jesus' words to her as a no. She goes to the servants and says, "Do whatever he tells you." This Scene Number Two in the wedding drama is just as baffling as Jesus' words have been. His words are: "My time has not yet come." Her words are: "Do whatever he tells you."

Jesus up to then does not act as if the hour for his self-revelation has come. How does his mother suspect that the hour is indeed at hand? Jesus is so connected to his Father in heaven that he ignores his earthly mother in this instance. He waits for God, not Mary, to reveal this hour.

Apparently, the answer from above is also yes. The time for the first sign of who he really is has arrived. He says to the servants to fill with water the large jars that stand at the entrance of the house ready for the household's purification rituals. It is clear that these jars are used only for water. The servants must have thought: What is he doing? Is he going to fool the guests somehow? But who are we to question important guests? So they do as they are told.

And now the peculiar play continues. Scene Number Three. It must have taken quite a bit of time to fill the jars up. After all, they had no running water; they had to go to the well to draw it, and that's a lengthy process. When the jars are full, the servants hear the next step in the drama that is unfolding. Jesus tells them: "Now draw some out of the jars and take it to the chief steward," the man who is responsible for the approval and serving of the wine. The servants must be mystified. They know that the jars contain water, but now they see that the water has color; it looks different from what they had drawn from the well. What is going on here? We had better wait for the steward to discover it, they think. No need for us to get into trouble.

In the ritual manner of the wine steward, the man takes the beaker and tastes the liquid. His eyes must have shown his surprise. This is good stuff, we can hear him saying while looking at the servants as if they are somehow responsible.

Scene Number Four. He goes to the host and offers a mild criticism. The man has served at many feasts and banquets and knows his wine. He tells the host: you have saved the best for the last. This is not done. First you offer the best wine and then, when they are too drunk to notice, you offer the inferior wine; that's how it's done. You have reversed a time-honored tradition. We are not told what the host thought or said.

The scene ends there. We are left to fill in the blanks. What John tells us is that the disciples – newly chosen, newly called – believed in Jesus as a result of this Epiphany. What John emphasizes is that this is

the first sign that reveals that God's presence is unhindered within Jesus: This is his glory. On an ordinary day when two young people are married, as they have done through the ages, a young man from Nazareth reveals that he has creative powers that can affect even nature. An Epiphany for us and for him. An uncovering that allows light to shine into a long creative process. An uncovering that shows us that his hour has come.

This is not magic. This is the true connection to the Creator. Every Epiphany is a moment of creation, even for us. Let us allow the Light to shine for us and through us to lead us to reveal God's power to the weak, God's love for the neglected, God's mercy for all us, sinners.

Above all, let us pray for an Epiphany that reveals to us who Jesus Christ really is.

*This sermon was written by **Katerina Katsarka Whitley** for Epiphany 2 (C) in 2013.*

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