

Second Sunday after the Epiphany – 2025

Isaiah 62:1-5

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

John 2:1-11

Do you suppose that there is a connection between the First Commandment and the Sixth Commandment? Let's put them side by side. You shall have no other gods. That's the First Commandment. You shall not commit adultery. That's the Sixth Commandment. Do you suppose that there is a relationship between those two commandments that goes beyond mere divine prohibition? Here's the Small Catechism's explanation of the First Commandment: "We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things." It isn't just that I should love the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit *more* than I love some other supposed god, as though our Triune God simply wants to be your favored god, one among many. The First Commandment prohibits us having any other god at all; that's clear, right? Here's Small Catechism's explanation to the Sixth Commandment: "We should fear and love God so that we lead a sexually pure and decent life in what we say and do, and husband and wife love and honor each other." There is an exclusivity element to marriage. I suspect that your spouse doesn't want to simply be the most loved among the multitude of your intimate relations.

There's a line in the rite of Holy Matrimony that reflects this reality. Both the bride and groom are asked, "will you love, honor, and keep him/her in sickness and in health and, forsaking all others, remain united to him/her alone, so long as you both shall live?" It's a beautiful line. It bespeaks exclusivity. Do you hear the echo of the First Commandment in that line? In the Scripture, God has spoken of Himself as Israel's husband. The church is referred to as the bride of Christ. Sadly, there has been a great deal of infidelity. In the OT, the Israelites were often guilty of pursuing other gods. For His part, the Lord Almighty was thoroughly faithful, pouring out His love on His people, entering into a covenant of devotion and grace, taking unworthy Israel as wife and giving to her all the adornments of a queen (Ezekiel 16:1-14). Here is the strong language that follows the description of God's devotion to Israel (from Ezekiel): "But you trusted in your beauty and played the whore because of your renown and lavished your whorings on any passerby; your beauty became his" (Ezekiel 16:15). God's people were unfaithful. They built false places of worship. They chased the Baalim. They broke the covenant that God lavished upon them. He shared His holiness with them and they soiled themselves with false gods. Though He was husband to them, our forebears broke the First Commandment with astonishing recklessness, often shamelessly.

Jesus comes to a wedding. It is the beginning of His ministry. His mother is there. The mother of our Lord comes to her son to beg. "They have no wine" (John 2:3). It isn't just a pronouncement. Mary is asking Jesus to intervene. He knows it. Listen to how the Lord replies: "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come" (John 2:4). From that reply we get the impression that Mary was asking Jesus to die, asking for the wine of His blood right then and there. Every time we hear about Jesus' hour in the Gospel of John it is in reference to His death. Mary tells the Lord that they're out of wine and Jesus jumps to His hour – an unmistakable reference to His cross. And Mary herself, she only shows up in John's gospel here at the wedding at Cana and at the foot of the cross; that's not a coincidence. How will Jesus intervene? Who is going to restore the broken relationship between God and man?

You know what sin has done. We have proven ourselves to be unfaithful. We cast an admiring glance at a multitude of things that would take the place that is to be reserved for God alone. We flirt with the world shamelessly, like a harlot. You feed your desires and God goes a-begging. Your worship and prayers falter. Spiritually, you covet something new, something that titillates. God's gifts of love and grace are treated as second-hand offerings. You know what sin has done, in our culture, in your heart, mind, and soul. Who will restore us?

I visited Bill and Delores McDaniel in their home this last week, to commune Delores, who is bedridden due to a stroke she suffered some months ago. The conversation turned to Christmas and Delores was keen to tell me about a necklace that Bill gave her. As Bill went off to fetch the prized item, Delores said this to me: "We're closer now, since the stroke. The stroke has brought us closer together. We were drifting apart. Now, we are so close. Every now and then, for no reason, Bill will come over and kiss me." The words made my heart swell. But more than the words were Delores' eyes. I could see in her eyes, as she spoke, that she knew that she was loved and that by virtue of that love she was like a young fawn in her heart. After the words came out, as the thought of what she had just said circled in her mind, I could see her joyfully trading her loss of physical strength for the renewal of marital love. She glowed. Bill and Delores McDaniel will celebrate their 74th wedding anniversary in February.

Jesus is at that wedding to show us our restoration. OT purification water is about to be changed. Mary told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). NT wine, a greater purification, will flow in abundance. It is Christ and His blood that will restore soiled people to God's covenant, the new covenant. A miracle! A revelation of Christ's divinity! True God and true man, Jesus is the instrument to restore marital fidelity between God and His people. Jesus is the First Commandment in human flesh. "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). He loved God above all things and He truly loved His neighbor as Himself (Mark 12:30-31). That love was determined to give itself as a sacrifice to cleanse us, to purify us, to prepare us as a bride for our heavenly bridegroom (Ephesians 5:25-27). This Divine Service is much like a wedding. The sacrament of the altar is foretaste of a wedding banquet that has been prepared for you in heaven.

Listen to this from Revelation: "Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, 'Hallelujah! For the Lord our God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted to her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure' – for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb'" (Revelation 19:6-9). A marriage banquet in heaven; redemption and love and grace and beauty and connectedness and intimacy and joy and music and glory – the marriage feast of the Lamb in His kingdom and we are headed to that splendor! The holy banquet of Christ's body and blood is that future reality breaking into this temporal sphere. Jesus brings that heavenly union to us now as we receive His body and blood and we become one flesh with Him.

He restores us. He rejuvenates love within us. He treasures us and, for no apparent reason, gives us the riches of His grace. We receive this wonder and, as the joy His sacrifice circles in our hearts, we know that nothing in this life compares. What you receive here is God's glory. This is how John ends his description of the miracle at Cana. "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him" (John 2:11). Ultimately, where did Jesus manifest His glory? Ultimately, where did Jesus manifest His love? Where did Jesus spill His blood and anchor His grace and unleash His power? The One who changed water into wine was crucified for the sins of the whole world. He bore our punishment. He died our death. He reclaimed us for the Father. The church is the bride of Christ and His faithfulness to us has saved us from death and hell. That glory – His humility, His willing service – is what you receive when you commune at this altar. The miracle at Cana is about the crucifixion, it is about the church being reclaimed as the holy bride of Christ. The miracle at Cana is about you and this altar. His hour has come. His glory is here. You are treasured by the Son of God. His love restores us. The First and the Sixth Commandments are united, fulfilled in Christ the King, and that fulfillment is given to you.