

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

NO WINE/NEW WINE

John 2:1-11

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Analysis by Ron Starenko

1On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. 3When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "The have no wine." 4And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." 5His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them to the brim. 8He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 9When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk, but you have kept the good wine until now." 11Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

DIAGNOSIS: The Bad Signs—No Wine

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – Depleted

Lots of things can go wrong at a wedding. I've known some. The flowers never arrived, the rings got lost, a fire started when the candles burned down. A few people have passed out from heat, exhaustion, or drunkenness. The bride got sick, the groom chickened out at the last minute. But, I've never been at a wedding where "the wine ran out" (v. 3). Can any of us imagine the bar being closed before the reception dinner got started? That would be a disaster, a minor one, really. In a more telling fashion the no-wine syndrome gets played out in our lives in countless ways, times when we are depleted. We run out of time, we run out of patience. We run out of energy when age creeps up on us. We lose out in relationships. We see the end of dreams. Eventually we all say at one time or another that we ran out of luck. Bad signs, all of them.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – Defeated

All are symptomatic of a deeper problem. As crises begin to pile up in our lives, a growing sense of helplessness and panic sets in. We reach for this and that to get through the day – wine maybe, an affair perhaps, a different job, a new car. We seek to overcome our feelings of defeat by denying our fear and anxiety or by immersing ourselves in the fads of our culture, whether secular or sacred. We look for quick fixes, resorting even to prayers lifted heavenward, blind to the fact that we are running on empty, without a faith to sustain us. More bad signs.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – Deleted

The most ominous sign of all, ultimately, is to have no God to turn to. When the wine has run out, first the good stuff and then the inferior, we can come to the hour of our deepest need, only to be found wanting, always on the verge of being depleted. When God is hidden from our view, inaccessible, in those moments

when we experience God's wrath, then bitterness and hostility overtake us, and we end up tasting the dregs of the old creation coming undone. At the wedding in Cana, when "the wine gave out," (v. 3) Mary runs to Jesus saying, "They have no wine" (v. 3). And Jesus says to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you or to me" (v. 4)? Jesus regards the problem as something more than an embarrassment or an inconvenience. Seeing here a far deeper problem, he knows that the old order of things, all that we call good, will inevitably run out. He recognizes that no wine is a sign of the disastrous human condition, and a magician cannot save us.

PROGNOSIS: The Good Sign—New Wine

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – Redeemed

At the same time Jesus refuses to turn away. He seizes the moment to give a signal, then and there, that the new is unfolding before their very eyes. Jesus uses the occasion of that wedding to give a sign that reveals his redeeming presence. Never one to avoid reality, Jesus wills to be present in the human disaster we call life, knows all the bad signs better than we do, what it is to run out of wine, as though our loss were his very own. He knows that changing water into wine is not the answer to our need. "My hour has not come" (v. 4), he said. What happened at the wedding is a sign of what was yet to come, the hour of his death, his glory, when he would deal once and for all with the history of the human disaster. Jesus comes to the moment for which he was born, to redeem a world that had broken with God from the beginning, to redeem a people God had chosen as a bride now living in unfaithfulness, to redeem the human race running out of everything. Finally, lifted up on a cross, emptied of everything, he takes our place in order to bring to an end the condemning signs that dog our days. He comes to establish a new and everlasting covenant, ratified by a new wine, red as blood, the good sign that a Messiah has appeared to

turn our death into new life.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – Revived

And now newness abounds. The marriage feast of the Lamb has begun, as the baptized people of God gather around the Table of forgiveness and hope, believing in Jesus (v. 11; 20:30-31), filled with the living Lord (John 6). The Holy Eucharist is now the sign of new wine available, Jesus present, God remembering the new covenant, reviving us, strengthening our faith, restoring our hope. When life often seems to be one bad thing after another, no wine is turned into new wine by the power of good news. Wondrously, “the first of his signs” (v. 11), when Jesus turned water into wine, pointed to the epiphany of his death and resurrection, the sign that the messianic age is underway, and we are now blessed to taste how good it is.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – Renewed

As we live out our days under these signs, good signs all, we no longer cling to the old creation with its signs of death, dragged down by defeat and despair, no longer the “Forsaken” or the “Desolate” (Isa. 63:4). Instead, we know the goodness of the new, rejuvenated by the presence of our Lord, turned into latter-day signs ourselves, people with a new spirit, living at peace, seeking “the common good” (1 Cor. 12:7), sharing “the wine of gladness,” inviting others to the wine-tasting party of God’s unfailing love, as we “drink from the river of (God’s) delights” (Ps. 36:8). God has saved the best for the last, enough to sustain us to the end, to the hour when all of God’s promises will be fulfilled and all will be new forevermore.