

Second Sunday after the Epiphany

THE GUEST WHO'S COMING TO DINNER

John 2:1-11

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Analysis by Bruce T. Martin

2:1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They 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 up 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: Not Recognizing the Guest among Us

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Guests of Whom?*

[In John's Gospel, the "sign" (v.11) that "revealed" (from the Greek *phaneroo*, "to manifest") Jesus' glory to his disciples (by supplying the super-abundant wine/joy of the kingdom of God) was to prepare them for yet another sign, his cleansing of the Temple (2:13-23). ... But ...] Let us here consider the other guests at this seemingly ordinary wedding. They, too, are invited. They, too, partake of the revelry and the "good wine" (v.10; that is, better wine than was first served). Yet they don't recognize the sign, or the significance of one who is among them: this Jesus and his disciples. By all appearances, Jesus is just another rabbi who, like them, was invited to the party. So ordinary! So ordinary that even after the better wine was served they did not take any special notice; nor, I suspect, would we. By all appearances, the "good wine" that Jesus wrought was wasted on them.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Who Invited Whom?*

By all appearances, the most important person at the wedding was the bridegroom, the one who had invited everyone else. Thus the steward goes straight to the bridegroom who, presumably, could explain this lack in etiquette. But neither the bridegroom nor the other guests ever thought to take a second look at Jesus. He remained to them as ordinary a rabbi as ever there was. Therefore their lives with all their expectations remained just as ordinary. Little did they know, let alone believe, that they had all been invited by Jesus to witness the beginning of their redemption!

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *Wasted Wine, Wasted Miracle, Wasted Guests*

Either the good wine that Jesus miraculously wrought was wasted

on the other guests, or they were too wasted (“drunk” v.10) to notice . . . to notice, that is, the Guest among them. Too bad, because they were left in their (“spiritual”) stupor, their hangover, whether drunk or not. Worse by far is that these other guests were left without any expectation or hope of what *life* might be like with Jesus in their midst. Now that’s a waste!

PROGNOSIS: The Guest Who Invited Us to Dinner

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Jesus! Who’d Have Guessed?*

Though the other guests barely noticed, Jesus was there among them, manifesting his glory. The better wine that Jesus wrought signaled (“sign”-ed) the beginning of our redemption. Jesus was not simply a fellow guest; he was the Guest par excellence (1:9-14). He invited all the guests, as also he invites us, to witness his glory, that is, our redemption. At this wedding, he was and is the Husband of Israel (Isa. 54:5-8) and the Bridegroom of the Church (3:29; Rev. 21:2). Meaning that he is intimately among us, loving us unconditionally. Yes, this Jesus who would be scourged and crucified on our behalf, and “after three days” (see v. 1) raised from the dead; who is promised to come again in unbridled power and glory, not to destroy us but to enliven us with his holiness and forgiveness and endless joy.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *No More Guessing, Just Celebrating*

But for the time being, this wedding Guest is manifest among us hiddenly, ordinarily, so that it is impossible for us to apprehend him as the Husband and Bridegroom he is without trusting that he is and will be the final fulfillment of every promise of God. This is what the disciples saw in him when they “believed in him” (v. 11), if ever so briefly and tentatively. For there was and is much yet to reckon with: sin and death and

evil of every sort, both in us and around us. But if God, in the flesh and blood of this hidden Guest, has come among us to redeem us with his life, then we can trust that God will have the last word over against Sin and Death and Evil of every sort.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *The Guest among the Guests*

Life is daunting, as the other guests knew very well; it's not easy having fun when so much evil is swirling about. So we take advantage of the little parties, but most especially the ritual ones, in anticipation of that Dinner Party yet to come. As we do, let us pause to consider Who is among us, albeit hiddenly, leading us along the way of our redemption. But that is only the beginning for us! Like our crucified Guest, there are more fish to catch and more dinners to eat.