

Our Purpose is to Point to Jesus

John 2:1-12

May 13, 2007

Today's sermon has two movements. We will first spend some time working our way through this interesting story. Second we will draw out two very simple truths. The first about who we are, and the second, about who Jesus is.

The book of John begins in a flurry. After John introduces what it means that Jesus came "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God." He then jumps right to the first week of Jesus' ministry. Like the end of the gospel where he focuses on each day of the Passion week, John methodically describes what happens in each day of the first week of Jesus' ministry. The repetition of the word *day* reminds the reader that the day of the Lord long foretold by the prophet is here. The first day of that week was the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. On the second day, Jesus called the first disciples to follow him. And here in chapter two on the third day Jesus, his mother, and his disciples have been invited to a wedding in Cana, likely a town nearby Nazareth, in Northern Israel, west of the Sea of Galilee. Likely

the wedding was that of a relative of Jesus, but perhaps it was just a close friend of the family.

As a woman, it was likely that Mary was staying in the same quarters or nearby quarters as the servants, and so that is why she probably comes to know of the wine shortage before Jesus knew of it. Or perhaps she was close to the mother of the groom and had the mother confide in her the social faux pas that was about to occur: no wine at the wedding!

So Mary approaches Jesus and tells him “they have no wine.” Notice she doesn’t ask anything of Jesus, she just tells him what has happened: there’s no more wine. Why does she approach Jesus? Does she think that Jesus is resourceful and can somehow figure out a solution? Does she think he is going to perform a miracle? We don’t know for sure. However, I would suggest that she does believe he can perform a miracle. Why else would Jesus admonish her “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come”? It seems that he perceives that she expects him to perform a miracle.

But this brings another question. Why does Jesus speak this way to his mother? “Woman, what does this have to do with me?!” Kids, when your mom asks you to make your bed this week, go ahead and try this one on for size. Say: “Woman, what does this have to do with me?” Just

kidding! You better not respond that way! “Woman” actually sounds a lot harsher in the English than it is in the original language. In fact, we find that Jesus frequently refers to the women who approach him by that title “woman.” It is respectful, but definitely not endearing.

It tells us something about who Jesus is. Jesus is not the kind of Jesus that we see so frequently painted in soft tones with tender doe eyes turned heavenward. It underscores one fundamental attribute of Jesus: he is always about his Father’s business. Jesus never merely reacts to please people or make people feel good. Jesus always acts in a manner that advances his Father’s agenda. Jesus always is aware of the hour God has for him and obediently awaits the Father’s guidance.

Mary’s response is beautiful. She says to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

From it we see two things. First, it is obvious that Jesus’ words are not taken as a harsh rebuke by her. Perhaps she remembered back to when Jesus the youth stayed back at the temple, listening and asking the rabbis questions and she and Joseph frantically looked for him for three days. He responded to them when they found him, “Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house.” Not *would* be in, but *must* be in. Jesus must be with and beside his Father. Jesus, fully man and fully God did not have a split

agenda. He was fully his mother's son, and certainly cared for her deeply (just look at the cross where in his last moments he is thinking about caring for her, telling his friend and disciple John to take care of her). But Jesus was about his *Father's* business.

Second, we witness that in response to Jesus Mary takes a posture of faith. This is not a mother who knows her son will eventually cave to her agenda like the Mom who, frustrated that her child won't leave the playground says, "Fine, well, I'll be in the car," knowing that once she leaves the child will cave and come to the car. This is not a motherly manipulation trick. This is a mother who knows her son will do what is best – that which is the Father's will.

Mary points to Jesus.

We don't know how Jesus apparently has a change of heart. Perhaps he then prays to the Father, or perhaps he knew this was the Father's will from the beginning, but wanted to make it clear he was acting at the behest of his Father and not mother. Either way, Jesus performs his first recorded miracle, and in many ways, his most unique miracle. He simply asks the servants to fill six huge jars with water, and they obey to the fullest extent, filling the jars up the brim. And by the time the master of the feast has tasted that water, it is wine.

So why is this Jesus' first sign? Why not a healing? Why not raising someone from the dead? Because Jesus is ushering in the Messianic age where the wine was predicted to flow freely by the prophets Jeremiah, Hosea, and Amos (Jer 31:12-14; Hos 14:7; Amos 9:13-14).

Jesus overflows and breaks out of the Old Covenant. He reveals the Father's *shequinah* glory in a new and incredible way. Where there were once purification jars now stand jars of wine of celebration. In doing so Jesus actually breaks the Jewish laws of purification, and yet he does so with a greater purpose in mind. As John 1:14 says, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." And why did Christ perform signs and wonders? Why did he reveal the Father's glory? So that those who witnessed it might believe.

And so this is an invitation, an invitation to the feast of the Son. It is an invitation to behold and know the Son and the Father. The quantity and quality of the wine underscores the incredible opulence of the new kingdom Jesus is ushering in. It is a miracle of extravagance. Over time it will become clear that this is an opulence of grace, faith, and hope, not worldly power or riches. The words of the master of the feast have a great double meaning: "you have kept the good wine until now" – Jesus' is the good

wine. Just as Christ miraculously and against social convention makes the best wine appear last, so does God give his best – his Son – last. He is now revealed. The new wine bursts forth from old wine skins.

So let's draw out two very simple truths from this passage. The first is what this passage reveals about our own identity. Our purpose is to point to Jesus. Mary in this passage serves as a wonderful prototype for what evangelism at its best looks like. She turns to the servants, and merely points to Jesus, "do as he says." This is evangelism. This is what we're called to look like in our daily lives, pointing to Jesus.

The 20th century poet Ezra Pound once said, "do not describe, present." That is what we're called to do in evangelism. We are called to introduce people to Jesus. Is there a time to answer people's philosophical or theological or scientific questions about God? Certainly. But the purpose of all of that is only to push the brush aside so that they can meet Christ. Do not describe, present. That's all evangelism is: introducing people to Jesus.

There are two parts of our call to witness: the words we say and the things we do. These all too frequently seem to be poles that we can't mediate. It is hard to get the right balance. Some of us share about Jesus frequently, speaking of the goodness of our Savior to everyone around us. But our lives don't quite match that and point to Jesus in the same way. To

the outside world our frequent sharing looks like nothing more than the crutch of someone who clearly can't pull it together.

Others follow the old mandate "preach the gospel, use words when necessary," but in reality that means to us that we only try to care for people with our actions and our mouths rarely if ever share who Jesus is with those around us. Pointing to Jesus means both are required. Say and do. Preach and act. In a day and age where pluralism abounds, don't assume people understand why you are honest or humble or caring. On the other hand, never misjudge how much your life means to your witness.

And how much better do we have it than Mary. She only had a very vague idea of who Jesus was. But Jesus has been revealed to us. We know who he is: Prophet, Priest, and King. He is God's only Son, the Second person of the Trinity. The medieval theologian Thomas Aquinas once said that only way to get a person to come to your point of view is to walk over to where they are and lead them by the hand to where you are. The best way to bring a people to Jesus is to bring them to him and let them meet him. You cannot talk someone into belief and you cannot defend who Christ is. You must allow them to meet him. Let them meet him in the gospels; let them meet him in prayer. Let them meet him through you and the church, his body.

A little boy returned home from his first day of Sunday school class and his mother asked, “Who was your teacher?” The little boy answered, “I don’t remember her name, but she must have been Jesus’ grandmother because she didn’t talk about anyone else?” Talk about Jesus. Let Jesus be part of your life’s narrative. Let other see how Jesus is part of your story.

Our final point is what this passage reveals about who Jesus is. So, who is the Jesus that we are called to introduce others to? This passage tells us three things about Jesus. First, Jesus reveals the Father’s glory. When we meet Jesus, we meet God. Second, Jesus is strong. Christ is not the willowy passive figure we frequently make him out to be. His love and grace overflows out of his strength and not his weakness. Third, Jesus is the bridegroom of a glorious new kingdom that has been inaugurated. He bids us to come. Come to the feast of the Lamb. Come to the wedding of Christ and his Church. Come partake of his abundant and overflowing grace.

This is the Jesus we are called to point to. So frequently when we talk to unbelievers about Christianity, we feel like we need to protect God, defend him. The questions in our unbelieving friends, family, and coworkers’ minds beg for an explanation for the evil in this world, for the violence and the injustice. They question the scientific side of things and they doubt such a stark exclusivity that Jesus claims. These questions are

important, but they are peripheral. They are the brush in the path to the person of Christ. It is important to move enough the branches to get through, but you needn't worry about chopping them all down. You won't do it and neither should you try. They are not the important thing, bringing them to Jesus is.

The 20th century American preacher George Buttrick once said: "It would be little avail to ask how we know. That would be like asking how we know that Beethoven's Hymn to Joy" is joyous... There is no logic to establish an axiom, for an axiom is the basis of all logic; and ... Jesus [is] axiomatic truth. Jesus is light, and there is no proof for light except light itself." God is not afraid of the questions people have. God is not afraid of your questions or my questions or the hard questions of your family and friends. God is God. God wants those questions brought to him. Faith isn't quashing those questions before you approach the throne, faith is bringing those questions to the throne.

So, show your friends Jesus. Encourage them to read the gospels, or better yet, read the gospels with them. Encourage them to pray, or better yet, pray with them. Be authentic about your own faith. Don't feel the need to protect your unbelieving friends from your own struggles and questions. Point them to Jesus in the way you rejoice with them and mourn with them.

Point them to Jesus in the way you serve them and the way you listen to them.

My brother-in-law just sent me an article from Sports Illustrated, of all places, with an incredibly moving story about what it means to point to Jesus. Columnist Rick Reilly tells the story of Mark Lemke, a 51 year old truck driver who lost his 19 year old son last year in a motorcycle accident. Tony Dungy, the coach of the Indianapolis Colts and a strong Christian, heard about Mark's loss and responded.

One day Mark gets this call: "Mr. Lemke?" the voice says. "It's Tony Dungy."

Naturally, Lemke figures the call is a joke. But Dungy persists, "No, it is Tony Dungy," "I'm just calling to offer my condolences to you and see if there is anything I can do to help you."

Now, you've got to understand, this was in October. The Colts were into the teeth of their schedule, the most critical season in Dungy's life, not to mention Peyton Manning's, not to mention the million of Colts fans'. They figure if their team doesn't win it all this year, the genie goes back into the bottle.

But Dungy has his own sorrow to swallow. His 18-year-old son, James, hanged himself three days before Christmas in 2005. And Lemke

knows this. So maybe Dungy, who's the same age as Lemke, is a guy who can relate. So they talk, and the coach tells Lemke to keep in touch.

"The hardest thing for me is, I sit in that truck all day, and all I do is think about him," Lemke tells him one day. "You're lucky. You've got so many people around you to get you through the days."

"Yeah," Dungy says, "but it doesn't get you through the nights."

Dungy has a wife, five kids, the monster job, numerous charities he works with and a thousand things to do, yet he takes the time to answer every Lemke e-mail, gives his cell number and returns every call. They go deep sometimes. Lemke gets hot at God for taking Cory. Dungy tells him that's normal, but adds "we'll see them again."

Then it's the playoffs, and Dungy is apologizing for not replying to Lemke right away. "Sorry about not getting back to you," he e-mails Lemke one day. "Sometimes I can go a few days without getting on my computer, especially if our defense is not playing well."

Next thing you know, the Colts are in the Super Bowl and Dungy is inviting a man he's never met, a Vikings fan, no less, to be his guest there. So Lemke finds a load that needs hauling to Florida and a load that has to come back, and he drives his 18-wheel rig to Miami. The day before the game he meets Dungy in person at the team hotel. They hug. They visit.

They pray. The next day Lemke takes his seat in Dolphin Stadium and watches his new buddy win it all.

And this is only one stranger whom Tony Dungy has befriended. There's the former high school coach in Wisconsin whose son committed suicide. There's the young kid in Indianapolis who lost his mother and brother in a car wreck. Heart broken people all over are suddenly getting a hand up from a man who himself should be a puddle but is instead a river of strength.

Yet Dungy refuses to talk to the media about these good deeds, which only makes them better.

"I'm awfully grateful to him," Lemke says. "He helped me keep my faith. He taught me that he and I – we're not alone."

Point to Jesus, my brothers and sisters.