

Sermon Text for October 3, 2021

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Judges 14:5-9, John 2:1-11 *“The story of Jesus’ first miracle”*

We began this series of stories of the Bible, stories to live by on Mother’s Day this year, May 9, and our last one is scheduled for the last Sunday in October and it will be Job. So, if we did not cover your favorite Bible story, or your least favorite, if there is a Bible story that you want us to cover please let me know, otherwise we will transition to another series as Advent is fast approaching. Stories of the Bible are inherently Scriptural, they come from the Bible, and we understand Scripture as our authority for the simple fact that it reveals and is consistent with the nature of God.

Jesus’ miracles reveal to us who God is and their purpose is to bring us to belief in him. This is crucial. We have been saying all along that miracles that take place in the Bible are not for the sole purpose of healing an individual or providing food, or in this case wine, but rather so that the glory of God can be manifested to those around. Yes, of course, the individual who is healed benefits, but that is not the end or even the primary purpose. The primary purpose is to reveal who Jesus is so that people would come to believe in him. This is the case in our miracle today as well, our Bible story for today.

Both the Samson and the miracle of changing the water to wine provide us an insight into a God who wants good for us, is pleased to provide us with pleasure, but only so long as it is for the sake of leading us to believe in God as the provider, as the faithful one, as the giver of love and grace, as the one who forgives even in the midst of our tremendous sin. Let’s read about another miracle.

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We find ourselves back with our friend, well, after what we learned about him a few weeks ago not so much our friend, Samson. It is a young Samson before Delilah who is interested in another woman and is on his way down to meet her with his mom and dad. A lion bothers him with his roar and we read that the Spirit of God came upon him powerfully and he ripped the lion in half as if it were a young kid. I wouldn’t know what ripping a young kid in half would be like, but I’m getting from the story that because of the presence of God, it was really easy.

He doesn't tell his parents, he meets the woman, falls in love with her and becomes engaged. He goes back home and then he heads back to marry her when he runs across the same lion, a carcass now, and inside that carcass is a hive of bees which has produced honey that he scoops up, eats, and then gives to his parents, again, without them knowing from whence it came. Just another typical day in the life of a protagonist in the Bible. When we have our Thursday evening Bible studies I normally rate my first Scripture reading on a scale of 1-10 on its relevance to the second Scripture reading from which I get my primary lessons.

This might be a 2 out of 10 for this week. But there is a hidden lesson that could have some overlap with Jesus' miracle that we just read about and that lesson is: God takes pleasure in pleasing us. This is not the main topic but it may be the lesson that you remember, that God takes pleasure in pleasing us. Have you ever thought of that? I have tried over these years to move you away from a God who wants you to feel guilty, or afraid, or unworthy or unloved and toward a God who loves you unconditionally, but I don't think I've ever gone so far as to say that God takes pleasure in pleasing us, I like that.

This takes us to a wedding in the New Testament where they run out of wine and Jesus comes along and provides more wine. Now, a note of caution. God takes pleasure in pleasing us but within the parameters that He sets which eschew sin and drunkenness and addiction. That is not pleasing to God.

Let's go ahead and turn to our God who loves us so much and is pleased when we discover pleasure. There is a wedding in Cana which is about 8 miles north of Nazareth. You remember Nazareth, the town where Jesus grew up and is considered his home town. Nazareth was below the tunnel and considered a bit backwards, right. The wedding was probably a family member of Jesus, his mom is there and he brings along his whole entourage, all of his disciples. No wonder the wine ran out. The mother of Jesus, she is never mentioned by name in John, you know, Mary, comes up to Jesus and says: The wine is all.

Notice the exchange between Jesus and Mary. It marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry and he calls her, what? Woman. It also marks the end of Jesus' ministry. Remember when he is hanging on the cross and he looks at her and his beloved disciple John and calls her, what? Woman, this is your son, and then to the disciple, this is your mother. Jesus, can you do something, and he basically says no. But her response in vs.5 is not the response of someone who just heard no.

In fact, we will use verse 5 as our operating verses for this Sunday as Mary tells those who would listen, do whatever he tells you to do. Brothers and sisters of Strasburg, we serve a

God who takes pleasure in pleasing us, do whatever he tells you to do. I don't care how hard it is, I don't care what you have to sacrifice, do whatever he tells you to do. Don't drag your feet, don't make excuses, don't think it applies to everyone else but you, do whatever he asks you to do.

They do, they fill to the brim the vats and Jesus produces 600 more bottles of wine. That's how much 150 gallons of wine would come out to be. That's a lot of wine even for Presbyterians! But I want you to notice who was the first to be aware of what Jesus did? It wasn't the people in charge, it was the servants. Look at vs.9 in the parenthesis, the servants, the lowest of the low. They were the only ones who knew the full story. Just like the shepherds were the only ones who knew the full story, just like the Samaritan woman was the only one who knew the full story, just like the women at the tomb were the only ones who knew the full story, just like the man wearing camel hair was the only one who knew the full story. It seems like God chooses the least of these to impart his most important lessons.

The story ends with a commentary. Look at vs.11, Jesus did this miracle, what he calls a sign, so that his glory would be revealed and so that his disciples would believe in him from the get go. We see a bookend of explanations for these signs, these miracles that Jesus did in his ministry in John. Look at the next to last chapter in John, in 20:30 where we read – Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples...

These are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the son of God, the one who takes pleasure in seeing you pleased. Is this the God that you serve? Communion is for us a visible sign of God's invisible grace. It is a visible sign that God smiles at us as we take pleasure in his presence. This sign is supposed to lead us to believe even more in Jesus as our Messiah, as one who even while we were yet sinners still chose to die for us so that we could eternal life. Jesus chose to die for us so that we could take pleasure in this life and in the life to come.

This sign, this tangible sign of bread and juice ought to elicit the type of belief that then leads to trust. I pray that God will work in all of our lives in order to see his presence in just as tangible a sign in our every day lives. Amen.