



Sermon for the Second Sunday after Epiphany Romans 12:6-16 & St. John 2:1-11

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Do people see Christ in you? That's a question that each of us needs to be asking if we call ourselves Christians—followers of Christ. After all, what's the point of being followers of Christ if we don't follow him? These Sundays of Epiphany are a reminder from the Church—a reminder that just as Jesus has manifested himself to us and given us his light and life, we need to be living in such a way that we manifest his light and his new life to the world around us and draw others to him.

We saw this in last week's lessons as they showed us our *duty* as Christians. We saw the example of Jesus, who not only knew the duty he had to be obedient and submissive to his earthly parents, but who was also obedient and submissive to his heavenly Father—and not just obedient and submissive, but fully and wholly devoted to knowing and to loving and to serving his Father. His duty to his Father was so obvious that he was truly confused when Mary and Joseph panicked when he turned up missing and they spent all day looking for him. When they found him and told him how worried they were, Jesus didn't understand why. He asked them, Didn't you know that if I'm not in your house, then I must be in my Father's house? Haven't you seen my devotion to my Father?

We also read the first verses of Romans 12 where St. Paul tells us that as Christ has offered himself as a sacrifice for us, we ought to offer ourselves as living sacrifices to the Father who sent him. This morning our Epistle picks up at verse 6, where last Sunday's left off. Paul now shows us that being a living sacrifice doesn't just involve a vertical relationship with God, but that it plays out in the horizontal too—as we see the needs of our brothers and sisters and even the needs of the world around us. If last week was the “Sunday of Duty”, today is the “Sunday of Sympathy”. Today's lessons remind us that just as Jesus saw our need and lovingly manifested himself to us, so as we see the needs of others, we should lovingly manifest Christ to them by graciously meeting their needs.

Jesus gives us the example to follow and we see this in our Gospel, from John 2:1-11. St. John tells us that a few days after Jesus was baptised by John, he and his disciples went with his mother, Mary, to a wedding in Cana. This was a small town a short distance from Nazareth. The tradition in Judea in those days was for a big celebration to follow the wedding itself and that the celebration would typically go on for the whole week, but all the festivities were typically kicked off with a big banquet.

Now consider how important a wedding reception is in our culture. The bride wants the ceremony and her gown to be perfect, but her parents want the reception to be perfect. Far too often these things become Mom and Dad's opportunity to impress all their friends and neighbours and some people spend obscene amounts of money to pull it off. It wasn't very different in the ancient world, but in that time the banquet and celebration were even more important to the people than they are today. The worst thing that could happen was for the groom—who was the one to throw the party in those days—to let the festivities fall flat.

So Jesus and his mother and friends were enjoying themselves at this wedding when suddenly Mary whispers in Jesus' ear, “They ran out of wine.” And Jesus leans back and whispers, “Why are you telling me this?” Now at this point a lot of Christians today might get the wrong idea. I think we have a popular image of Jesus who went to the wedding because he knew that marriage is a good thing established by God. (The Prayer Book in the Wedding Office reminds us that by being there that day, Jesus sanctified marriage.) But we think that's as far as Jesus went—as if his friends dragged him to the party and while everyone else was drinking and dancing and having a good time, Jesus was sitting there with a cup of water—no wine for Jesus!—and with a disapproving scowl on his face. Mary tells him they're out of wine and Jesus says, “What's that got to do with me? Good! They shouldn't have been drinking in the first place!”

What really happened is just the opposite. Jesus didn't ask what it had to do with him because he wasn't participating. His reason, as he tells Mary was: “My hour has not yet come.” Jesus was sympathetic to the groom's problem. He knew that running out of wine in the middle of the celebration was something this poor man would never live down, but he also knew that Mary was asking him to perform a miracle and he felt that to do so would prematurely manifest his true nature—his divinity—to the people

there. And yet Mary still had faith. She left Jesus and went to the servants, pointed to Jesus and said, “Do whatever he tells you.”

And this is where Jesus does what we don't expect. He leaves the party, and seeing six big jars that were used to hold water for ritual purification, he tells the servants to fill them with water. Were they bewildered? Mary knew who Jesus was. These may have been servants of a relative and maybe they had heard stories about Jesus. We don't know what they were thinking, but they did what he said and filled the jars. Then he told one of the servants to draw some out and take it to the master of the feast—the host. Again, we don't know what the servant was thinking, but I can only imagine his look of surprise when he dipped some of the water out and saw that it was red and had turned into wine. And I can imagine how much more surprised he was when he took it to the master and saw the look on the master's face as he tasted it, because the master then called over the groom—the one who was responsible for providing all the food and wine. The master immediately went to the groom thinking something was wrong—maybe this wasn't the right wine, because as he says to the groom, everybody else serve the good stuff first, then after everyone's had plenty to drink and isn't in a state to care anymore, then they serve the cheap stuff. But this! This was even better than the first wine they had served!

St. John tells us this story because it was the first of seven specific signs that Jesus gave—signs that manifested his divinity, his glory, and his position as Messiah. He tells us that when the disciples saw the miracle, they believed. But there's more to the story than that, because the story tells us something about Jesus and his character. He was sympathetic to the problems of the people around him. We see that throughout the gospels as he heals the sick and even brings the dead back to life, but this is the first of his miracles. In comparison it's something so small. No one was sick; no one was dying. The only things at stake were a party and a groom's reputation. And yet Jesus saw this need and he met it. And even in meeting such a mundane need, he isn't stingy. He didn't turn the wine into “two-buck chuck”. It wasn't dealcoholised. It was the real deal and it was top-notch. And he didn't just make a little bit. He made 500 or 600 litres. That's a lot. I make wine in 23 litre batches and it takes me a couple of years to drink it all. Jesus made twenty or thirty times that much—enough to keep the party going, to keep everyone having fun, and to save the groom's reputation.

Remember that in coming as one of us and in living the same kind of life that each of us lives, *Jesus sanctified human life*. As I said last week, he was an Average Joe for thirty years before he took up the job of Messiah for his last three years. Jesus didn't come to take us away from our day-to-day lives, but to sanctify our lives and to fill them with his grace as he restores our fellowship with God. Through his life he makes it possible for us to be living sacrifices—to turn our lives into acts of worship. And we see this as he sanctifies this wedding feast.

Here's our problem: We get the "big" miracles; we understand Jesus going to Bethany to comfort his friends when their brother, Lazarus, died. It makes perfect sense to us to see Jesus offering not just his comfort in a time of pain and sorrow, but even raising Lazarus from the dead—working a miracle—in order to end that kind of deep sorrow. That's what we expect. When we think of sympathy, that's what we think of—being there in hard times. What we struggle with and what we often miss is how Jesus didn't just come to help people in their times of sin and sorrow or to deal with big and important situations. Stories like today's Gospel remind us that Jesus was there with people in the joyful times too and that he encouraged them in their celebration and sanctified their joy—and our joy too. The Gospel reminds us that sympathy isn't just about meeting people in their need, but that it's also about celebrating our joy together.

We need to remember this, because in contrast Christians can often be real wet blankets. But if we're going to manifest the light of Christ to the world, we need joy. Yes, the weight of seeing sin and death in the world and knowing that people all around us are hell-bound without Jesus should always give us a certain air of gravitas, but our sorrow for sin should always be tempered with the joy of Christ-in-us. There are times for sorrow and there are times for happiness, but the fact is that our default attitude should really be one of joy. Jesus was a "man of sorrows", but he was a man of joy too, and we see that in the Gospel. And what Jesus did at Cana is a type—a foreshadowing—of all of his saving work as Messiah. On that final day he'll banish all our sorrows when God will wipe away all our tears and the water of sorrow will be turned into the wine of joy at the marriage feast of the Lamb. To live out our new life is to live in joy—and not just personal joy, but joy that spills out to our brothers and sisters and to the world.

That's the life that St. Paul show us in the Epistle and that's the basis of our sympathy for others. We all know people who aren't Christians who can be very sympathetic just because they're kind people—because that's just their natural personality. But Paul reminds us that as Christians our sympathy and kindness toward others is rooted in the grace of God. Not all of us are naturally inclined toward being kind or gentle. Most of us are naturally lacking in sympathy for others. But that changes as Christ himself changes us. He offered his body on the Cross for us and as he unites us to himself, we become his body, the Church. And so we saw in last Sunday's Epistle, Paul was telling us that we who are many are made one in Christ and that we belong to each other. Last week he explained our duty and how we're to work together because we're members one of another.

Now Paul continues in today's Epistle, starting in verse 6, showing us that we should show love to each other for the same reason. He begins:

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 6:6-8)

Our diversity in unity is the foundation of our love for each other, and in fact, diversity is one of the most important ways we manifest our love to each other. Not only does God bring together all sorts of different people with different backgrounds and different gifts and abilities into his Church, but as he graciously gifts us spiritually, he gives us all different gifts. As he describes it in 1 Corinthians, we're a body and he gives that body all the parts it needs. He give it some people who are feet so that the rest has support. He gives some who are hands so that the rest can work through them. He gives some who are hearts, so that the lifeblood can flow through it. He gives some who are eyes so that the whole can see, some who are ears so that it can hear, and some who are mouths so that it can speak. Sometimes we might think it, humanly speaking, easier to latch onto other people just like us, but Christ calls us to latch onto the people who are different and he knits us together with his love—and in the end, we accomplish more and build his kingdom better than we could on our own. The

Church trains each of us to give of ourselves for the good of all. He goes on in verse 9:

Let love be genuine.

"Let love be genuine." What does that mean? St. John, the great disciple and apostle of love, says in his first epistle, "Little children, let us not love in word or talk *but in deed and in truth*." How many people do you know who claim to be Christians and can talk the talk, but totally fail to walk the walk? We all know people like that. They may be unrepentantly disobedient to Christ. Friends, that doesn't add up. Jesus said that we show our love for him by being obeying him. Some have little if anything to do with the Church. Friends, you can't claim love for Christ and at the same time forsake his body. But it's not a matter of showing up and warming a pew—it means, as we've seen, sharing your God-given gifts, but it also means showing love and sympathy to your brothers and sisters. Paul goes on:

Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. (Romans 12:9-16)

Do you see a pattern in those verses? What Paul's saying is that love is *selfless*. Love abhors evil, because even my secret and personal sins effect you and yours me—because we are one body. Love for each other means that we honour not ourselves but each other. Love for the body shows itself in being fervent to serve and to grow and benefit the whole. Love is patient, hospitable, and desires to meet others in their need. Love returns cursing with blessing; it rejoices with those who rejoice; weeps with those who weep. Love puts others first and the natural result is that we live in harmony. Love has no room for pride, and so each one treats others better than he would treat himself.

Think of the example of Jesus and how we see all these things in him. I mentioned the death of Lazarus earlier. We see Jesus weeping with those who weep in that story.

In today's Gospel we see Jesus rejoicing with those who rejoiced—and even sanctifying their joy and celebration by miraculously providing for them so that they might continue in it. And finally, think of how Jesus humbled himself—not putting himself first and not even insisting on the privilege of his own divinity—in order to become one of us and then to die for our sins that we might be restored to God.

We need regular reminders of this. And that's one of the reasons why we celebrate the Lord's Supper here each Sunday. St. Paul wrote that, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17). I know some people prefer it when we use wafers, but whenever possible we try to use a loaf of bread here, because that loaf of bread represents our oneness as Christ's Body. As we eat the bread, it should remind us that we should share a loving concern for each other. To quote St. Paul again, "If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together" (1 Corinthians 12:26).

We each need to ask if that's truly how we feel about our brothers and sisters and how we treat them. It's true that for all of us, there are some people here whom we probably like better than others—some people we have more in common with, whom we've known longer, or whom we find easier to get along with. But the love of Christ-in-us is deeper and broader than our *natural* feelings of love and affection. When we play favourites in the Body, when we ignore the people we don't naturally like, when we fail to take joy in the joys of others or to sympathise in the sorrows of others, we fail to manifest Christ. The same is true when we regularly absent ourselves from the Body. Ask yourself what it communicates to your brothers and sisters about how you feel about them, about your commitment to them, if you're regularly gone from the Body, instead of coming to love and support your brothers and sisters, instead of coming to share in their joys and sorrows.

So we come to the Table and eat and drink in remembrance of him. He gives us his body, which he offered as a loving sacrifice for us. He gives us his blood, which he shed because he loves us. The bread and the wine are given as reminders of his love and as we take them they should fire up our own love for him. But when he says, "Do this in remembrance of me," he wasn't just concerned about our love for him as we come to the Table. He also instituted the Sacrament to remind us of the love we

should have for our brothers and sisters. Again, we need this reminder. Too often we fall into the trap of thinking of our faith as "me, my Bible, and Jesus" and not much beyond that matters. But friends, the Lord's Supper reminds us that as much as the kingdom God is about love, it's more than just love for God. True love for God spills out and manifests Christ to the whole Body. There's no such thing as a loner Christian. There's no such thing as a Christian separated from the body. True faith always spill over in love for others and can never cut itself off from the Body of Christ.

But the Communion reminds us thirdly, that one of the great purposes of our love within the Body is that it spill out to the world. Christ manifested his light to us. We need to manifest his light to a dark world. We do that not only as we let the world see us loving each other and being sympathetic to each other, but as we go out to show the world love and to meet the needs of the people living in darkness—even in small and seemingly mundane ways. Today's Gospel reminds us that nothing was too small or too humble for Jesus. He sanctified all our earthly activity, and as we come to his Table in remembrance of him, remember his example.

So as we celebrate the Lord's Supper this morning, remember that we do this in remembrance of him. There's probably not much danger that we'll forget that he gave his life to purchase our redemption. When we recall his words "for you" we're reminded every Sunday that he has paid the price of our salvation. We know that all that is his is now ours—his righteousness, his perfection, his holiness, his glory. That's not where we have a problem. We remember how his death paid the price of our freedom from sin and death.

But we need to remember that to do this in remembrance of him means more. We need to remember how Jesus was so eager to find some way of keeping his people united in their love for each other. As we come to the Table, he wants every sin amongst us forgiven, everything that might divide to be resolved, and anything that might upset our love for each other to disappear. The love we have for him should unite us. He said, "Love one another even as I have loved you." That's his call to us this morning. And if we truly do love him, our greatest desire should be to please him.

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, as your Son blessed water and turned it into wine at Cana, so through the cross he blesses us,

sanctifies us, and transforms us. Father, remind us that his salvation is not meant to simply restore us to you, but that the Body of Christ is formed by our sanctification and that we live out our restoration to you through our unity in the Church—as we love each other, just as Christ loved us—sorrowing with those who sorrow and rejoicing with those who rejoice—that your love might continually be made manifest to the world. We ask this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.