

01.26.25 ~ Epiphany 3

“Jesus’ First Miracle”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 36:5-10 ^{NIV}

- ⁵ Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the skies.
- ⁶ Your righteousness is like the highest mountains,
your justice like the great deep.
You, Lord, preserve both people and animals.
- ⁷ How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
- ⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of delights.
- ⁹ For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.
- ¹⁰ Continue your love to those who know you,
your righteousness to the upright in heart.

Leader: These Loving Words Are from God.

All: Thanks be to God!

John 2:1-11 ^{NLT}

The Wedding at Cana

- ¹ The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. ³ The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus’ mother told him, “They have no more wine.”
- ⁴ “Dear woman, that’s not our problem,” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.”
- ⁵ But his mother told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”
- ⁶ Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus told the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” When the jars had been filled, ⁸ he said, “Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies.” So the servants followed his instructions.
- ⁹ When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. ¹⁰ “A host always serves the best wine first,” he said. “Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!”
- ¹¹ This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

Leader: These Words of John, the Apostle, Are from God.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Generous God, we are here grateful for the warmth and slow melting of the snow and ice. We regather in worship today in body and in spirit as some are travelling and only with us in prayer. We ask you after a busy week to take the things that

might be distracting us and to give us focus for your word and your message. May it strengthen us for the week to come and let us hear your voice in this message. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Welcome back! Sorry we could not meet last week, but we are glad you did not get stuck in the afternoon snow that finally did arrive. We also welcome back David who was travelling and Charles who played the organ for Beth at her church. It is good to be together again.

This Sunday begins our new theme of “*Vital Hospitality*” for 2025. And as we did last year with “Finding Beauty,” we will explore this broad topic gradually each Sunday throughout the year in Scripture, interpreting it personally, relationally, spiritually, historically, culturally, and corporately as a church. What does it mean to be hospitable? Why are we called to offer it? Is it vital to life and our time on earth or just a convenience? Is hospitality an attitude, philosophy, a core value, or just a cultural expectation? How has it changed over the years? Be thinking of your own questions to raise as we journey together.

Weddings today have become huge events taking years to plan and coordinate. The last wedding party I attended was a second wedding, so it was small and appropriate in scope and time. But before that, a different wedding I attended and did a reading for took all day, and yes, it was beautiful and extravagant with preparations, photos, the ceremony, a sermon, more photos, cocktails for the guests, a sit-down dinner, of course a DJ, and went late into the night with dancing. I had to leave early so I could be at church the next morning. In Jesus' day, the wedding feasts also were extravagant, lasting typically seven days! That is the setting for our second passage.

Weddings were and still are an opportunity for a couple to demonstrate hospitality to friends and family. A wedding is a marriage ceremony primarily, but it also honors and cements the relationships of two families coming together to form a new community of support. It celebrates love with a time of joy and expression, and in some cases unites people who don't really know each other in rituals that build connections that will serve the family in the future. Guests bring notes, poems, gifts, stories to share, toasts to give, and are thrust together socially in a good way. The event becomes a shared experience often recalled at other gatherings like future births and memorials. In Jesus' day, this also was true. Wine was an essential element of the celebration.

The origins of wine used for rituals or for these types of celebration goes back several thousand years before Christ. All wine could cause drunkenness, so there were many rules. The Nazarites never drank it; the temple priests weren't permitted to drink the offering wine lest it impair their duties and holiness. Making wine was an eight stage, lengthy process which included crushing, treading, pressing, straining, boiling, and several fermentations. Winemakers often added water to make inferior wine for less noteworthy occasions, or as in our John passage, to serve to the already inebriated guests who wouldn't notice! That is one reason why Jesus' miracle of changing water into wine and serving the best at the end of the party made such an impression. Sociologically, water was not always pure, and in his day never filtered or treated like we have today; so, most people drank or hydrated with wine. Wine lasted longer in jars and was safer on the digestion. Wine jars were often small, ½ gallon to 2.5-gallon sizes. Wine was also placed into animal skins for

preservation or carrying purposes. The jars in our story today, however, were filled with water for purification purposes (bathing if you will after a meal). They were 20-30 gallons in size. We saw several of those in Israel and are shown in the illustration on our bulletin cover.

Although the Psalm is from the lectionary readings for last Sunday, the words describe the hospitality of a loving God, the faithful, of those who love God, and the qualities of those who selflessly offer food, drink, and shelter to others. Watching individuals and groups of all ages come together to help the California wildfire victims have these characteristics and spiritual gifts of hospitality. The obedient believer described in this psalm will receive abundant blessings in return for those he shares with others. The children at the Food Mission made Valentines' Cards, thanks to Sally Norris' heart and snooky stickers! We had construction paper, markers, crayons, stickers, and much creativity in the room. They drew and wrote messages as well. One young girl wrote a beautiful note to her Papa. They have lots of energy and fill me with hope for the future. A new family's daughter, Melanie, has a birthday in five days, so we sang Happy Birthday to her in both English and Spanish with the help of another mom who was there. Melanie was so excited to receive a birthday cake sticker! Such simple gestures create a feeling of love and hospitality. We had a couple of hours of children's church! Some girls decorated their face masks, and I talked about Bobby Joe making me a mask for the hospital that says, "I love Jesus!" They liked that idea, and made their own with Bible stickers, crosses, and words like faith and grace. They loved the book basket, and one girl took a New Testament pocket bible upon my invitation. One new and popular toy was a little shopping cart,

but I need more interactive toys. We have a chalkboard, doll, a wise owl puppet they named Oscar, some teddy bears, a small truck, balls, crayons, but we need more markers and helpers! I feel like every time I am there, I see miracles happening, especially how they play together, some siblings, some cousins, and some make new friends. It is a joy to serve in this way; I am being disciplined by the children sometimes.

In our story, Jesus' first miracle was known only to his disciples and his mother. Toward the end of the 7-day wedding feast, the host ran out of wine. Mary asked Jesus to help solve the problem, but his time to reveal his identity had not yet come. But she gently convinced him to help, so the servants were to do what he asked of them. They brought out the purification water jars and discovered they were filled with the best wine ever tasted! Jesus' first miracle contrasts with Moses turning the rivers to blood, bringing fear to Pharaoh. This miracle, however, of water into wine brought joy and hints of the future joy of the Holy Spirit.

As we explore Vital Hospitality, let's look at the importance of providing figuratively speaking "superior wine." For his disciples, this showed the Son would be superior to the religious leaders and supernatural in his divine power. In our world, what does this miracle mean? Can our openness and faith be the superior wine of welcoming spirit to others in our midst? Like the warmth of our building or a handmade quilt given on Saturday, hot tea and hot cocoa provided our Food Mission guests, children's activities to give moms a break while they rest, and a caring spirit to learn their child's names or wish a little one a happy birthday! In this climate of immigration fear, can our hospitality be vital and life giving to those who are anxious? Jesus loves

all; what about us? Will we serve water or the best wine? Will we share Jesus? Amen? Amen! ||

Let us pray. Loving God, we thank you today and every day for our Savior Jesus Christ, his life model, and his miracles. Please open our hearts personally and as a church to answer your call to hospitality for 2025. May your divine guidance strengthen our own purpose, drawing us together in service. We ask you to help us share our faith with others. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.