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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado  
Epiphany 2, Series C  
Saturday, January 19<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
Sunday, January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2019 (Sanctity of Life Sunday)

Sermon: “Do Whatever He Says”

Text: John 2:1-11

Focus: Jesus is God’s Son revealed in human flesh.

Function: That they would persist in prayer.

Structure: Story-Interrupted

Locus: “With these words, God tenderly invites us to believe that He is our true Father and we are his true children, so that with all boldness and confidence, we will ask as dear children ask their dear Father” (SC, Introduction to the Lord’s Prayer).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Can you imagine how difficult it must have been to be Mary? How would *you* handle being the mother of God incarnate? I know that all of us probably wish we had the perfect child, but what would that actually look like, in practical terms? For example, if you ever got frustrated or mad at Jesus, you couldn’t really yell at him or punish him, could you? After all, he was the sinless Son of God who never did anything wrong (cf. Heb. 4:15). Nobody likes a know-it-all, and Jesus was *never* wrong. So when you lost your temper with Jesus, you’d feel terrible! I doubt that Jesus was a tattletale because he was so forgiving. But it must have caused tension in the family that his brothers and sisters could never get away with anything by blaming it on him. Who broke the window? *Not* Jesus! Who flushed a toy down the toilet? Definitely *not* Jesus! Who drew all over the wall with crayon? *Anybody* but Jesus!

But because he was a human being, sometimes you’d be tempted to treat him like any other ordinary kid. And when you did, he’d throw it back in your face that you had it all backwards. Remember the time when Mary and Joseph headed home from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, only to discover that Jesus wasn’t with them? For three days they searched high and

low, looking for him all over the busy city. And when they finally found him sitting in the Temple courtyard talking with the teachers of the Law, Mary yelled at him. She *yelled* at him! “Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress” (Luke 2:48, ESV).<sup>1</sup>

And do you remember Jesus’ cool reply? “Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my *Father’s* house?” (Luke 2:49). Those words must have smarted a bit, as Jesus put Mary and Joseph in their place and reminded them that God was his true Father, and they were only (merely?) his earthly parents. So it was perfectly natural and expected for him to be in the Temple and not with the pilgrims headed home to Nazareth. Why should they be worried that they couldn’t find their son, who might be lost or dead or shivering in the streets? What was the big deal? Why were they so upset? *Now* do you understand why it would be difficult to be Jesus’ mother?!

Today’s Gospel reading presents us with a similar situation, although it happens 20 or 30 years later. Jesus, Mary, and his disciples are invited to a wedding in the little town of Cana. And even though Jesus is now a man full-grown, we know the reality. To a mother, her children will always be her babies. They will always tug at her heartstrings. And she will always view them as within her reach and control.

“They have no wine,” Mary says to Jesus matter-of-factly, when the glasses run dry at the wedding reception. Only, we all know that it’s not really an innocent observation. It’s more like a request—perhaps even a demand! It’s like when my mother used to tell me, “Christopher, your room is dirty.” Mom wasn’t just commenting on the situation. Rather, she was telling me—no, *ordering* me!—to clean my room.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

Mary was like any other mother. And when the wine runs out, she tells Jesus to do something about it. “They have no wine.”

Whenever I perform a wedding for a couple, I always remind them at the wedding rehearsal that something *will* go wrong. And that’s okay! Expect the unexpected, and you won’t panic when it occurs. Something small always goes amiss. Nobody ever gets hitched without a hitch! Usually, it’s not a big deal.

But in the ancient world, a wedding without wine would prove to be a very short party indeed. So Mary is right to be concerned.

But Jesus brushes off his mother with a curt reply. “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come” (John 2:4). Now I don’t know about you, but if I heard one of my sons talk to their mother in this way, they’d immediately find themselves in a world of trouble. Maybe it sounds nicer in Aramaic.<sup>2</sup> You don’t go around calling your mother “woman!” You don’t even call your wife “woman,” unless you’re a redneck or a chauvinistic bully. Gentlemen, I dare you to call your wife or mother “woman” the next time that you see them. Then, when you end up in the hospital, call me and tell me how it went!

But not only does Jesus tell off his mother—“Woman, what’s this got to do with me?”—he also tells her that she’s out of line (or at least off-schedule). “My hour has not yet come.” It’s not a good time, mom! I’m not ready to do that... *yet!* My hour has not yet come. It’s not time for me to start doing miracles and making my way to the cross. My hour has not yet come. It’s too early. Mother Mary, you’re just too *pushy!*

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<sup>2</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Beyond Words: Daily Readings in the ABC’s of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), s.v. Mary, 244.

Now Jesus' pushback could have silenced Mary. Or she could have yelled and screamed and thrown a fit, as all parents sometimes do when their children don't listen. But instead she did something else entirely. She patiently persisted.

Mary didn't know what she got in Jesus' bonnet. But she knew that he had the power to do precisely what she asked. He had the power to make miracles happen. If Mary was *Theotokos*, the mother of God, then that meant Jesus was *God!* And Mary knew that God always answers prayer.

So she went to the servants and said, "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). Do whatever he, Jesus, tells you to do. And with this simple instruction, Mary's very last recorded words in Scripture do something marvelous: they point us to the power and authority of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. For just as Mary told those hapless waiters, "Do whatever he tells you," so also her words reach across the centuries and millennia and command us to do the same: Do whatever *Jesus* tells you, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ. Mary isn't the one in charge, and neither are we. Jesus is in charge. And he's running the show on his terms and his timing.

Roman Catholics make too much of Mary. They imagine that she was born sinless (the so-called "immaculate conception"). She is not the queen of heaven. We should *not* pray to her, thinking that she has some kind of power or sway over her Son in heaven. For the Bible says that "there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5). We have no command in Scripture to pray to Mary and the saints; nor do we have any promise that they can hear us. So we're better off going straight to the source: Jesus Christ himself. That is what Mary did when she said to Jesus, "They have no wine." She prayed to her Son to do something about the wedding disaster.

But Protestants do Mary an injustice when we ignore her. She is a heroine of the faith and a powerful example of what it means to be a Christian. After all, she was the first one to hear and believe the promise of Jesus' birth, when the angel Gabriel announced that she would bring the Son of God into the world through her womb. Mary's persistence reminds me of two other women in the Gospels: the Syrophenician woman who begged Jesus to heal her daughter (Mark 7) and the poor widow in Jesus' parable of the unjust judge (Luke 18). Both women were initially rebuffed in their requests. Jesus told the Syrophenician woman, "Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (Mark 7:27). But the desperate mother didn't let up: "Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs" (Mark 7:28). Amazed by her bold faith and determination, Jesus granted her request and healed her daughter.

Nor did the widow in Jesus' parable give up, and the judge finally granted her justice. As Jesus said, "And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will give them justice speedily" (Luke 18:7-8a). Even a wicked judge will, on occasion, grant a request just to be rid of you. But Jesus told this parable "to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart" (Luke 18:1). In other words, no matter what your desperation or need may be, don't give up! Keep praying! Keep asking! Keep begging! Keep persisting! God will answer for Jesus' sake.

And so Jesus answers his mother's prayer. He tells the servants to fill up the water jars used for ritual washing, and so they do. Then he tells them to ladle it out for the wedding planner to sample. And when he does, the master of the feast is amazed beyond belief by how good it tastes. "Most people serve the good one first," he says, "and then, after everybody gets drunk and can't tell the difference, he serves the cheap, boxed wine. But you have saved the best

for last” (cf. 2:10). Jesus listened to his mother’s prayer, and the servants did what Jesus told them. And so disaster was averted and the wedding was saved!

But there’s something eschatological happening here too. The Old Testament prophets saw wine as a symbol of divine blessing and favor. They prophesied that on the Day of salvation, the mountains would send forth streams of sweet wine, and the hills would overflow with it (Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13). God serves only the best for his people (Isa. 25:6). And so the miracle of turning water into wine was more than good luck. It was also a sign—“the first of his signs”—that God’s kingdom was beginning to break into our world with a new creation.

I like to joke that Jesus’ first miracle was to keep a party going, because without wine, it would’ve been a wedding disaster, and all the disgruntled guests would’ve gone home. But all jokes aside, it’s important to remember that Jesus did this first miracle at the request of his mother. Mary’s prayer prompted him to do something big and wonderful for that young bride and groom. Jesus still does miracles today. He still answers prayer. It doesn’t mean that, like a genie or Santa Claus, he will automatically give you whatever you ask for—sometimes his answer is “no” or “wait.” But whatever Jesus gives he knows is best for you. He withholds no good thing from those who believe and trust in him. “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good!” cries out the Psalmist (Ps. 34:8). The wine Jesus served at the wedding was the best that anyone ever tasted.

God always saves the best for last, which means, dear brothers and sisters, that the best is yet to come. So keep on asking, keep on praying, and keep expecting God to do in the unexpected in your life. Listen to Jesus, and do whatever he says. He still manifests his glory among us today so that we will believe in his name. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of ✠ the Holy Spirit. Amen.