

John Sampson
"The First Sign"
Text: John 2:1 - 11
Preached at KVCC
February 3, 2019

Will you pray with me?

God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you, our rock, and our redeemer.

Amen.

I love the image printed on the cover of our bulletin today.

It makes me happy because it's filled with love, and with a miracle, and it's a vision of an old story made new.

It's the artist, James Janknegt's interpretation of the story we just heard read to us.

I have to laugh. There's Jesus in a tie, looking like my Uncle Charlie.

He's sitting at a table with his mother Mary. And they're talking to the stewards about water, and filling jugs. And all of this is happening in the background. It seems like they're missing out on the reason they've come to Cana; they're missing out on that central moment of the wedding they've come to attend. Because right here, right in the middle of the picture, larger than life, is the married couple dancing together for the first time as man and wife.

But the artist Janknegt doesn't let us, the viewer miss the point. Our gaze is front and center on the married couple dancing, and only then, on the periphery do we see the drama of Jesus and Mary being peeved with each other, and of a miracle occurring.

I really appreciate what Janknegt has done for us in this painting. Because if we just heard our story, as it's told by John, we too would have been pulled into the drama of Jesus performing his first sign, and the wedding and the dancing couple would have faded into the background.

Today we come to this table. And there's a lot going on. There is a tower of little cups filled with juice, and napkins, and plates filled with pieces of bread. And as we perform our sacrament of communion there will be a set of rituals to perform, and words to say, the ushers' movements will be choreographed just so.

And we may be so focused on how we perform our ritual that we lose sight of the amazing thing standing right in front of our eyes. In our thinking about what we have to do next, and

making sure we don't spill our cup of juice, we may allow the reason for us coming together to completely pass us by.

You see we've been invited to this place, and this time, not as guests who need to worry about what table they're seated at, and where we need to leave our present. We've been invited here today so that God can pledge her love to all of us one more time. So that she can remind us that she has committed herself to us through sickness and health, for richer and for poorer. We have come here this morning so that God can once more take us out on the dance floor of life, and before all of creation, announce that we are hers, and that she is ours.

And she does it right at this table.

She tells us that all are welcome.

She tells us that all will be fed.

She gives each one of us exactly the same portion of bread and juice as everyone else.

She tells us to eat and drink because we have something to celebrate.

Here at this table we celebrate God's love for us, and our love for her. We celebrate a love that will never die, even if our bodies should pass away. We celebrate not the cups, and the plates, and the ritual movements, but the love that stands behind it all and radiates through it all.

Look at the picture on the cover of the bulletin again. In the bottom right and left corners are images of the communion bread and juice. Janknegt, the painter, has also recognized how this story of wedding is reflected in what happens at this table. He has revealed how the bread and the wine of our ritual is the expression of the wedding dance, of God taking us in her arms, and pledging her love to us forever.

Why do the atoms that make up our body attract each other instead of repel each other?
Because of love.

Why do we, as a species, have consciousness to see the beauty of our world? Because of love.

Why have we been endowed with a sense of ethics that helps us build a society where might is not right? Because of love.

Our tradition tells us, the story of the wedding at Cana tells us, Janknegt in his reimagining of events at Cana tells us, our monthly sacrament of communion tells us, that love is the precondition for our very existence.

You didn't come to church today. You came to God's banquet of love for all of her children. This is truly the first sign of Cana.

And it's only when we can see this great truth of God's overflowing love for us that we now have the eyes to fully appreciate the miracle that Jesus, wearing a tie and looking like my Uncle Charlie, is performing in the background. In the midst of this celebration of love, there is Jesus changing water into wine. There is Jesus inviting us to look up out of our day-to-day lives and become the agents of God's love that is all around us. There is Jesus taking the ordinariness of our hearts, and through his words and his example, transforming them into vessels that can hold love, and pour it forth to all who are so desperately thirsty for it.

This is what it means to follow Jesus.

We follow the one we call the Christ so that we can be transformed, that our hearts can love more, and our hands can help more.

This is where Christ's miracle happens, here in our hearts. Here at the wedding banquet of God's love for all of her children. Around a table like this one.

Amen.