

Sermon for January 17 2010 Epiphany 2C – St. Francis

I doubt that it would be a surprise for most of you to hear that the wedding industry is thriving. In fact, according to Chris Jaeger's Sell More Weddings web site there are approximately 2.5 million weddings every year in the United States. Given that the average budget for a wedding is 20,000 dollars, over 40 billion dollars is spent on weddings each year in this country. 40 billion dollars! All of this is spent in an attempt to have a memorable and special event to celebrate the couple and their life together.

Much time and energy, as well as dollars, are spent by each wedding couple in hopes that this wedding will be the one that their guests remember. A rising trend in this industry is the use of a wedding consultant whose job it is to help avoid any possible slip ups leading up to the wedding or on the wedding day. You know those slip ups like running out of wine at the wedding reception. Isn't it interesting how despite our best efforts to do something well like have the "perfect wedding" it is always the unexpected that we remember? Think back to the weddings you have attended maybe your own wedding. Are you able to smile at the miss-steps and the miscues? Are you able to embrace the delight of telling about the things that did not go as expected?

For Mark and me these are the stories most frequently told of our wedding. The fact that despite the wonderful buffet at our reception and the promise that a box would be filled with food for us to eat after the reception so we would not have to take time away from our guests to eat when we arrived at the cabin at 11:00 that night, our boxed dinner consisted of a deviled egg apiece and 2 pieces of cake – one bride's and one groom's for each of us. Oh yes, and there was that bottle of champagne which was wrapped with a tea towel. That was the real blessing because our friends, who had given us the cabin to use and assured us that we did not need to bring our own sheets and towels, had forgotten to leave any for us. That tea towel wrapped around the bottle was our only towel for the weekend.

Yes, we love to tell that story. But the incident from my wedding that I had not expected and touched me most deeply was the guest who had not received a formal engraved invitation. I had seen him as I walked down the sidewalk on my father's arm ready to enter the church for the wedding. He was an older man with a couple of days' stubble showing on his chin. Though worn and somewhat tattered he did have on a sports coat and slacks. He was pulling his coat collar up to protect him from the chill wind on that December day. He looked down the sidewalk with some surprise as I turned to mount the stairs of the church. Our eyes met and I

smiled. Without planning it I found I was smiling warmly and invitingly to his man I had never met. He in turn graced me with a smile and a tip of his hat. In that brief exchange he knew that he was invited to share in my special day. He would not take a seat in a pew but stood at the back of the church for the entire ceremony. Still, the tip of his hat and his presence at my wedding continue to touch me deeply – an unexpected grace on a day I had so carefully planned. Only a few people ever knew he was there.

By now, I may be the only one telling his story. Just as in the end according to John's account we think that only the servants and the disciples knew what happened that evening in Cana. It is because of their telling and retelling the story that we now know this famous wedding story of a potential social disaster averted. I have always loved this gospel story. Part of why I love it is because Jesus is so human to me in this miracle at the wedding in Cana. Consider the exchange between Jesus and Mary. Can't you see Jesus with his disciples standing to the side chatting? Mary comes up, tugs on Jesus' sleeve then announces: "They have no wine." In true motherly fashion her expectation of what Jesus should do goes unsaid. But Jesus knows what she wants. His reply is a little sharp, and he tries to separate himself from his mother's expectation by formally addressing her as: "Woman." Yet despite Jesus' rebuke of her Mary is persistent. As though she didn't hear him she turns to the servants and instructs them as any good matriarch would: "Do whatever he tells you."

Did Jesus give an exasperated sigh before he told the servants "Fill the jars with water"? Remember we are not told his tone of voice. But even though he told his mother that his "hour had not yet come" he graces this wedding with his first miracle. This wonderful act of creating something new without fanfare in fact without attempting to get any credit – remember the wine steward had no idea from where the wine came – Jesus quietly directs the water changing into wine. No words are said over the water; no manual acts on Jesus' part are related. He merely instructs that the jugs be filled with water and then tells the servants to let the steward taste the contents of the jugs. Such a quiet miracle in the telling and yet such a profound one. Jesus graces the feast with an absurd amount of wine. John makes certain the reader knows that the result of this creative act is between 120 and 180 gallons of wine - - the modern day equivalent of over 500 bottles of wine! Jesus blesses this celebration and blesses it abundantly. Just as God has blessed us and blessed our parish here at St. Francis.

Jesus' first miracle shows us how intimately involved the Divine can be in our everyday lives. We have only to open our spiritual eyes to see such involvement around us. In his first miracle Jesus' actions clearly proclaim God's call for us to view our lives as ones abundantly blessed. In light of the devastation in Haiti this week it is most important that we remember the blessings we have which we are called to share with others just as the wine was shared abundantly at the wedding feast. It is all of one piece. No amount of money or planning can fully prevent something unexpected happening. God participates in our celebrations and God joins us in our sufferings. This has been the Good News: God takes our empty jars in life and fills them with Divine love and tangible concern for each one of us. In the midst of rejoicing and in the midst of sorrow God is with us. Look around this room pay attention throughout the Eucharist: Open your eyes to the presence of the Holy Spirit moving among us.

Already so many of you have opened yourselves to use and develop the spiritual gifts with which God has graced you. This weekend during our vestry retreat we celebrated the multitude of gifts and talents which are present in our parish. These are the same spiritual gifts that Paul so carefully enumerated in his letter to the Corinthians. We as the Corinthian church must be ever vigilant in acknowledging the source of our gifts to pointing to the Holy Spirit of God moving among us gracing us abundantly. As we are blessed we are called to bless others by using these gifts for the good of God's people and all of God's creation. Clearly we have begun to do this, but we are called to do more. Because we have been abundantly filled with God's presence we must show forth God's presence in our lives. We must as St Francis admonished "Preach the Gospel at all times and only when necessary use words."

As we stand on the brink of a deeper call to serve God and to serve our neighbors, as we strive to respond to the needs around us let us live into the prayer on which the vestry centered this weekend may our creating God grant unto us, God's beloved children, new life; compassionate God, inflame our imaginations, enliven our love. May we dream new dreams, know courage unbounding and be filled with peace all for the glory of God's name. Amen.

