The Reverend Marjo Anderson

C: Epiphany 2

John 2:1-11

“Miracle of Joy”

Water into wine.

"Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee"

The FIRST of his miracles, according to John.

The other gospel writers don’t even mention this miracle, but in John’s story, it’s the first.

And what an interesting way to start.

If you were asked to rank Jesus’ miracles from most important to least,

you might rank this one near the bottom.

After all, things like raising people from the dead, healing people, feeding people, & calming a storm

are more important, right?

You might even think that that was what was in John’s mind as well —

that he would start with the least important one and work up to the most important,

except that is not how John thinks.

Remember how he opens his gospel?

Not with Jesus’ baptism, or Jesus’ birth, or Jesus’ genealogy,

but with the Word of God bringing all creation into being.

What a strange miracle!

I mean, how important could the running out of wine have been?

Why waste a miracle on something so frivolous?

In fact, that may have been how Jesus saw it at first:

a small problem, but not the end of the world, nothing that he needed to step in to fix.

But his mother sees it differently.

She tells her son of the problem. He says, “So what? It’s nothing that concerns us.”

But she ignores him and says to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

And he tells them what to do.

That tells us something about the kind of God we have:

a God of limitless power and unbounded love.

When you think about it, that’s absolutely amazing.

Since God can never run out of power or love,

that means God doesn’t have to save it all up for the important things;

there is enough grace to meet even the smallest need in the world.

And this miracle proves it.

That in itself is a wonderful message, but what John has to tell us here goes much deeper than that.

For John, it’s not about the miracle itself; it’s about what the miracle symbolizes.

In other words, it’s not about Jesus coming to the rescue when a particular wedding party ran out of wine.

It’s about what that miracle symbolizes.

There are probably dozens of things that it symbolizes, but let me highlight just a few.
First, it required that someone notice the need.
That’s what Mary did.
She noticed that something was lacking, that there was a problem, that someone had a need.
Second, it required her to bring that need to Jesus:
...“the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine”.
Third, it required persistent faith:
...Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? ....”
His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you”.
Fourth, it required someone to do some work.
...standing there were 6 stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20-30 gallons.
Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water”.
Filling the jars with water may not sound like a big deal to us, but remember the setting.
They couldn’t just turn on the hose.
This was desert country and they no doubt got their water from the town well.
Water is heavy, and transporting 150 gallons would not have been at all easy.
And it wasn’t as if they were Jesus’ servants and needed to listen to him.
And it wasn’t as if the task seemed important
But they did it. They filled the jars.
In fact, “...they filled them up to the brim.
It required faith and obedience.

These are the things we Lutherans do well – at least when we’re at our best.
We notice needs. We bring them to Jesus. We have faith. We obey. We work hard.
We feed people. We house people. We clothe people. We heal people.
We provide all kinds of needed social services.

But there is something else that I think is even more important than all of these things –
something that many churches forget about, but something that is at the heart of who we are here at Salem.
And it’s the reason that we do all of the things I mentioned above.
We don’t do it because it will buy us a ticket to heaven.
We don’t do it simply because it’s the right thing to do.
We don’t do it because it is expected of us.
We do it in order to share that which we receive as we are transformed by God’s love –
we do it in order to share our joy.

That’s the whole point that John makes by telling us the story about Jesus’ first miracle –
the miracle of turning water into wine at a wedding feast.
That’s what makes what we do here different
from what a government agency or a secular non-profit agency does.
We do more than feed and house and clothe and heal people.
For when we do those things, we also share the joy that God has poured into our hearts.

And that’s the most important thing you can do: share your joy.
As Og Mandino writes:
“If I bring rain and gloom and darkness and pessimism to ... [people],
then they will react with rain and gloom and darkness and pessimism...
If I bring joy and enthusiasm and brightness and laughter to ... [people],
they will react with joy and enthusiasm and brightness and laughter.”

Our gospel challenges us to allow God to transform our inner selves from water to wine,
wine that brings life and light to this wonderful party with Jesus. Amen

1 The Greatest Salesman in the World, Chapter 13, “The Scroll Marked VI”