

**“Claiming Our Christian Identity:
At the Wedding of Belief”
John 2:1-12**

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Dr. J. Howard Olds**

Once upon a time in Cana of Galilee, there was a wedding. Like all weddings in all towns, it was a glad and glorious occasion. Relatives were there. There were grandmas, grandpas, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, and lots of others. Friends came, the older ones, resting their bones in chairs while the young ones frolicked here and there. Since Cana was close to Nazareth, Mary, the mother of Jesus, came to the wedding as well. Some people believed that she catered the whole affair. Whatever official role she may have played, it is obvious that she became quite concerned when the wine ran out before the party ran down.

For centuries, we have noted that Jesus was at this wedding. After all, the ritual of Christian marriage says at the opening of the wedding ceremony, “with His presence and power, Jesus graced the wedding at Cana of Galilee.” According to John, the only gospel writer to include this story, two important things happened at this wedding. **The glory of Jesus is revealed, and the disciples believe.** As we claim our identity as Christians, I want us to ponder those two things today. The glory of Jesus is revealed, and the disciples believe.

At the wedding of Cana, the glory of Jesus is revealed. Glory, glory, glory, glory; the author of John loves that word. It shows up forty-two times altogether in this gospel. It is from the word ‘doxa’ that we get the word doxology and so we sing:

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,

*Praise God all creatures here below.
Praise God the source of all gifts,
Praise Jesus Christ whose power uplifts
Praise the Spirit, the Holy Spirit. Alleluia, Alleluia.*

This is our doxology. It is in Jesus Christ that the glory of the Lord is fully revealed. While shepherds watched their flocks by night, all seated on the ground, the angel of the Lord came down and **glory** shone around.

In the Old Testament, the dazzling radiance of God was such that humans could not look God in the face and live. John says in this gospel, "The Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father full of grace and truth." This unveiling, this shining, this glory of Jesus, is what the Epiphany season is all about.

Isn't it interesting that it is at one of life's most embarrassing moments that the glory of Jesus is first revealed? I've done hundreds and hundreds of weddings in my 30 plus years in the ministry. Without exception, there is one point in which all weddings are exactly the same. Everybody wants a perfect wedding.

Everybody sweats the small stuff when it's your son or daughter getting married. We worry about seating arrangements and bridesmaids' dresses. We worry about photographers and we worry about the reception. Since weddings are made up of people, they can never be completely perfect. Brides cry. Grooms faint. Rings roll across the floor and groomsmen go scurrying after them. Most often flower girls steal the whole show.

I confess before God and everybody that I once pronounced a couple husband and wife by the wrong name. It was one of my most embarrassing moments in ministry.

I remember on another occasion, I was reading I Corinthians 13, that passage of scripture that says, "Love is patient, love is kind, and love does not keep a record of wrongs. Love is not irritable." About half way through that text, the groom fainted...hit the floor, cold as a cucumber! His bride dropped to her knees and looked him in the eye and said, "It's ok, honey, we've got it on video. We'll send it to *The Funniest Home Videos* and pay for our honeymoon." When we finally got him revived and back on his feet, I began the scripture reading again and said, "Love is sometimes overwhelming." Strange things happen at weddings.

At this wedding in Cana of Galilee, they ran out of wine at the reception. Can you imagine the embarrassment of the host and hostess when the caterer comes running up to them and delivers the news? They continue to greet guests who have come to their party with things like, "So glad you came, please enjoy yourself but don't drink anymore wine," or "Make yourself right at home. It is so wonderful to have you here but if you don't mind, don't drink. Please skip the refreshment line."

It is here, in this embarrassing moment, with a little help from his mother, that Jesus intervenes. He intervenes in an extravagant way. He turns 180 gallons of water into wine and not the cheap stuff, either. It's the best wine that has been served at this three to five day party. Here at a wedding, the glory of Jesus is revealed. Isn't that amazing? It's absolutely amazing. Nobody's sick, nobody dies, we don't have to have a resurrection (even though the host probably felt like dying). We see the glory of Jesus revealed in a miracle that is extravagant and abundant. The One who would not turn stones into bread for His own comfort, does not hesitate to save a wedding from embarrassment of those who have planned it.

Isn't it about time for the glory of the Lord to return to church?
Isn't it about time that we see the glory of God again in worship? You see, we glorify sports; we glorify movie stars; we glorify musicians along with the rich and the famous. Maybe it's time to give the Lord some praise and glory in our lives. Amen's are allowed; applause is acceptable when it comes to giving God praise and glory.

This week, a newspaper writer asked me about our Saturday night worship last week. Among the questions he asked me was, "Did it have a Titans theme to it?" I thought that was an interesting question. I said, "The last time I checked, Titans were Greek gods and we worship Jesus Christ, the Lord of the universe." Isn't it time we returned wonder to the miraculous power of Jesus the Christ?

Mike Yoconelli in his book, *Dangerous Wonder*, says, "The most critical issue facing Christians is not abortion, pornography, disintegration of family, or school prayer. The most critical issue is dullness." We have lost our astonishment. Good news is no longer good news; it's just ok news. Christianity is no longer life transforming – it's just another option that you decide about on Sunday morning. Here at this miracle of turning water into wine, the glory of the Lord is revealed. The Shekinah presence of God is so bright that it is nearly blinding.

I am reminded of George Beverly Shea's gospel song that goes like this:

*There is a wonder of springtime and harvest,
The sky, the stars, the sun,
But the wonder of wonders that thrills my soul,
Is the wonder that's only begun.*

It's the wonder that's only begun when God through Jesus Christ dares to touch down into the daily happenings of our

lives. You remember the chorus...

*The wonder of it all, the wonder of it all,
Just to think that God loves me.
Oh, the wonder of it all, the wonder of it all,
Is just to think that God loves me.*

He loves me enough not to let me be embarrassed by my own mistakes. Isn't that the story of this fun miracle in the gospels? At the wedding of Cana, the glory of Jesus is revealed and may the glory of Jesus fill this place today.

At the wedding of Cana, the disciples believe.

Now if glory is a prominent word in the Gospel of John, **believe** is equal to it, if not even more so. You see, 'believe' is not a noun but a verb. To believe is to be convinced and to be so convinced that you act upon that conviction; that is belief in John's gospel. He tells us in Chapter 20, verse 31, "I write that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that by believing, you may have life everlasting in His name."

George Barna says 95% of Americans believe in God but then he quickly says that only 67% of Americans define God as all powerful, all knowing, the Creator of the universe, the One who rules the world today. There's a vast discrepancy between 67% and 95% and what I suggest to you today, my dear friends, is that just any old belief won't do.

There may have been a time, in a homogeneous society, where we could say to people, "Believe whatever you want to believe, just be sincere about it." If that day ever was, it is long since gone. It is vitally important **what** you believe and **in whom** you believe. That is the gospel for today.

We live in a culture of religious pluralism and secular paganism. It will not do anymore for you to fail to do your own

believing. You are a theologian as you sit in the pew. You make decisions about the belief systems and the commitments of your life, and you must be doing theology. In fact, you already are, in one way or another, day after day. We're called to know in Whom we believe and be persuaded that He is able to keep that which we've committed unto Him against that day.

Back in 1988, at the General Conference of our denomination in the wee hours of its closing session, the delegates voted to double the membership of the Methodist Church by the year 2000. Of course, the facts are, we've lost another million members since then. It was a rather hypocritical statement to begin with, and Will Willimon who always picks up on the hypocrisy of things wrote an article shortly after that legislation entitled, "My dog, the Methodist." In it, he presented an argument that says, "If the Methodist Church wants to double in the 1990's, they will have to start baptizing their members' pets and so, I submit my mixed breed terrier for baptism. After all, as far as I know he has shown no interest in biblical studies nor serious sexual fidelity, which would make him a perfect Methodist."

Now Willimon, as usual, is too cynical but even though he's cynical, he's somewhat right. Belief is no casual matter. A profession of faith is not just some little act of devotion that we do on Sunday morning. It cuts into the core of who I am, and what I am, and in Whom I believe.

Martin Luther King, Jr. stood on the steps of our nation's Capitol and articulated a visionary belief that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners, would be able to sit down at the table of brotherhood. He had a dream that his four little children would one day live in a nation where they would not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.

However appropriate it may be on this weekend to celebrate the dream of this great leader of America, let us never forget the greatness of Martin Luther King, Jr. He did not rest as much on his dream, as in his willingness to hope and to struggle, to be imprisoned and to be hated and, yes, to die for what he believed was yet to come to pass in this great country of ours. That's real belief. To keep living for his dream when his life is threatened because of it. That's what it means to believe.

If we want to honor him today, we will honor him best not by building monuments, but by building a better world and devoting ourselves to that unrelenting belief that the love of God and the love of neighbor happen to belong together.

I believe... I believe... How would you finish that sentence?

I believe for every drop of rain that falls, a flower grows.

I believe that somewhere in the darkest night, a candle glows.

I believe, I believe.

I believe above the storm, the smallest prayer will still be heard and someone in the great somewhere hears every word.

I believe every time a newborn baby cries, or touch a leaf, or see the sky, I believe, I believe.

In whom do you believe today?

I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord. I believe that anyone in Christ is a new creation, that the old is gone and that the new has come. I believe that the Church is of God and shall be preserved till the end of time as salt for society and light for the world. I believe that we must learn to live together as brothers and sisters or we will perish apart as fools. I believe that world poverty is a spiritual problem as well as a social problem and the Church must engage itself in

relieving suffering around the world. I believe...in what do you believe?

I believe that there is a spiritual hunger in America of fast growing proportions unlike anything I have seen in my lifetime.

I believe that the false gods of materialism, hedonism, and humanism will run their course and people like you and me, will discover how empty they really are.

I believe that we shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. I believe that it is a great and wonderful time to be alive. I believe, from the depths of my heart, that God has called us together for such a time as this, to do miracles and wonders and reveal the glory of Jesus that I cannot even begin to imagine in my small mind today. I believe. Do you believe?

You see, many of us have said, "Let me see it and I'll believe it." Let me tell you the world has not been shaped by that philosophy. The world has been shaped by those who said, "I believe it and because I can believe it, I will come to see it." It is to that affirmation of faith that I call us today!