

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

I'm going to do something unusual today. I am not going to preach the text. Rather, I'm going to use this Gospel text as a pre-text. That is, I'm going to use this text to talk about some thing else, something that I want to talk about.

For our visitors today, don't think that what you hear today is what our people get every Sunday. Not at all. Generally I preach the text. But today I'm going to preach the context. I'm going to preach about marriage. I have a bevy of young people in church today along with their parents, the young people singing and playing instruments — thank you, we're enjoying it!

And it is for their sake that today I'm preaching the context and not the text. I don't feel guilty about it, either. St. Augustine did it: "For this reason the Lord was invited and came to the wedding, that conjugal [marital] chastity might be given support and the mystery of marriages might be shown forth" (Quoted in William C. Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1-7:1*, 311). Luther did it, too: "The Lord wants to teach us that this is a holy and blessed life, that we should not disdain marriage but esteem it very highly as created and ordained by God, even as Christ did. ¶ Accordingly, this Gospel is a good sermon for young people ..." (Eugene F. A. Klug, ed., *The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, 5:235).

I admit it. Ultimately, this Gospel text is not about marriage or weddings or running out of wine. It certainly doesn't give cover to our Roman Catholic friends for praying to Mary, Jesus' mother. She had to be reminded again that Jesus is Lord, and that the Father had sent Him down to do the Father's business. "*What to me and to you, Woman. My hour is not yet come,*" is not exactly an obedient, "Yes, Mother." And Mary's response shows she learned again that Jesus was in charge.

So this text is not about these things. The evangelist John tells us why he included in his Gospel this "*first of [Jesus'] signs, [that He] did at Cana in Galilee ....*" It was to bear witness to the glory that Jesus manifested, to bear witness to the faith that this sign worked in the disciples.

John would repeat it toward the end of his Gospel, this time at the sign of Jesus' resurrection: "*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name*" (John 20:30-31).

But that's not what I'm preaching about today. Today, I'm using the text as a pretext to preach the context, for this first sign of Jesus took place at a wedding.

First of all, you know that marriage is under attack in our world today; it is much despised in our own country and in many parts of the world — but it's so

even among Christians so mired in the ways of the world that we don't even recognize our own disdain for the blessed estate of Holy Matrimony.

Consider the traditional bouquet toss. It evolved from the days when “[h]opeful single girls would . . . rush the bride—crowding her, touching her—in the hopes that a little bit of the bride’s wedding day good fortune would rub off on them and they would soon be married” ([www.brides.com/bouquet-toss-5077200](http://www.brides.com/bouquet-toss-5077200)). Today, the bouquet is tossed to the assembled single girls at the wedding, and the one who catches it is supposed to be the next lucky girl to be married — a bit of harmless fun. But in my experience, it often happens that the eligible single ladies don't want to take part in the fun at all. They don't want to give the impression that they want to get married at all. And if that's so for the ladies, it's even worse for the men with the garter toss. Statistics bear this little anecdote out — young people today are treating getting married like getting the plague!

But consider Jesus — “Our Lord blessed and honored marriage with His presence and first miracle at Cana in Galilee,” we say in the opening sentences of our marriage rite. He who instituted marriage in the beginning also commends marriage to us by His presence at this wedding. And Jesus was no killjoy. Far from putting a stop to the merry-making, Jesus helped the hosts out by saving them from embarrassment and changing water into wine, even the good stuff.

Second, you know that when Adam was first made, there was no helper fit for him. He was alone, and the Lord had said, “*That's not good*” (Gen. 2:18). And so, the Lord made woman from Adam's rib and gave her to Adam as his wife. A person's mother and father are important and always will be, but when a person grows up, he or she leaves the home and is alone, and marriage is God's remedy to that aloneness.

One hears and reads about some young women who have had a child because they don't want to be alone. And so, with the help of a man, but without the benefit of a husband, they have a child, and often another child for the first child does not relieve the aloneness, and another, etc. And don't get me wrong — having a child is a wondrous thing, but a child is not the remedy God gives to being alone. A husband is; a wife is.

You may remember as social media was just starting up, companies like Facebook promised all this greater connectedness. You can have gobs of friends and get reconnected with long lost friends, classmates, or relatives. And, I think Facebook and maybe other platforms have done some of that. And yet, young people feel more alone and disconnected than ever before. That's because Facebook and the Metaverse are not the remedies to aloneness. Marriage is.

Marriage is the goal. Therefore, young people, when you date, date with a purpose. And the purpose is to find your helpmeet, your spouse, the one that you

will be united with and become one flesh with, the one that will be a good mother or a good father to your children. Of course, you want that person to be a Christian, preferably a Lutheran Christian, and the church can help if he's not a Lutheran.

And when you find that person, dear friends, there is no reason to wait. Indeed, it is unreasonable for Christians to wait, at least those who seek to be faithful to the Lord's command to "lead a sexually pure and decent life" (Small Catechism, 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment Explanation) and who want to heed the apostolic call to "*glorify God in your body*" (1 Cor. 6:20). Even the strongest Christian would find it nearly impossible to remain a virgin until he or she is 30 years old, for it's especially in our youth that we "*burn with passion*" (1 Cor. 7:9). Marriage is the Godly remedy for this, too, not defiling the marriage bed (Heb. 13:4).

Third, you probably know that there are many other benefits to marriage — health benefits, both physical and mental: "On average, husbands and wives are healthier, happier and enjoy longer lives than those who are not married"; financial benefits: "Married couples build more wealth on average than singles or cohabiting couples"; benefits to children: children of two-parent households are "More likely to stay in school ... [they're] Less vulnerable to serious emotional illness, depression and suicide" ([www.foryourmarriage.org/blogs/social-benefits-marriage/](http://www.foryourmarriage.org/blogs/social-benefits-marriage/)).

That's all good stuff, but more important than all that is that marriage preaches the mystery of Christ and the church — "*Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.*" ... *I am saying that [this] refers to Christ and the church*" (Eph. 5:31-32). As the wife submits to her husband's headship, she bears witness to the church who submits to Christ. And as the husband loves his wife in the example of Christ, giving himself up selflessly for the sake of his wife and serves his family, he bears witness to Christ who gave Himself up unto cross and death for His Bride, the Church, and serves her by Word and Sacrament

Of course, only Christ Himself did His part perfectly — His was the perfect life, His was the perfect sacrifice, His sacramental service to us is perfect. Ours is not, but by God's gift of marriage we ever point to that perfect Bridegroom and rejoice in our spotless life in His. By God's gift of marriage we rejoice also that we are not alone, and with marriage as a picture of Christ and the church, that Christ is with us always, as He promised, to the end of the age (Matt. 28:20).

Therefore, may we Christians, young and old, cast off the world's disdain of marriage and honor it even as Christ Himself did in Cana in Galilee and blessed it, and still does today.

In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit.