

In the name of ✠ Jesus.

The Evangelist John begins this account with the phrase “*on the third day.*” It was the third day after some of John the Baptist’s disciples decided to turn their attention toward Jesus, for a few days before that John had baptized Jesus in the Jordan River; Jesus had begun a new role in his life — in fact, the role for which He was sent in the first place.

This new role, however, would require changes from the old. The old role was to grow and become strong, and be filled with wisdom. His old role was to be an obedient child and submissive to His parents — something He did without fail (Luke 2:40, 51-52). Indeed, He never did commit a sin (Heb. 4:15).

Jesus’ new role was proclaimed by John the next day after Jesus’ baptism, as John turned his forerunner’s finger toward Jesus and proclaimed Him to be “*the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (John 1:29). Jesus’ new role was to offer up His own precious blood as the ransom price for the world’s sin; it was to be the Divine “*lamb without blemish or spot*” (1 Pet. 1:19) sacrificed for us sinners ... on Calvary ... on a cross.

With that image in mind, then, what do you hear when you hear these words: “*On the third day*”? These words ring triumphant in the ears of Christians. Something happened on the third day. We know it well. It’s creedal language: on “The third day He rose again from the dead” (Apostles’ Creed). Here, at the beginning of His ministry, Jesus signals how His ministry would be consummated — in resurrection victory!

And don’t let anyone tell you that Jesus didn’t have this in mind (or the Evangelist John) as He begins His ministry. Right after Jesus does this first miracle, Jesus goes to the temple and cleanses it for the first time. And Jesus talks about destroying the temple and raising it back up in three days. What was that about? The disciples didn’t understand it, John testifies, until Jesus had risen from the dead. Cross and resurrection ... that’s exactly what Jesus is about, and that’s exactly what the Evangelist John wants to communicate: Jesus is that Lamb; Jesus is the true temple; and somehow, in today’s lesson, Jesus’ ministry is connected up with a wedding.

Thus Jesus begins His ministry at a wedding in Cana of Galilee, honoring a wedding couple. The wedding rite we use acknowledges this great honor: “Our Lord blessed and honored marriage with His presence and first miracle at Cana in Galilee” (*Lutheran Service Book Agenda*, p. 65). And pastors have used this text to laud marriage — like St. Augustine: “For this reason the Lord was invited and came to the wedding, that conjugal chastity might be given support and the mystery of marriages might be shown forth” (William C. Weinrich, *Concordia Commentary: John 1:1–7:1*, 311).

But our question is: what is the connection of Jesus' Ministry with weddings? Much, if you believe what else the wedding rite says: "In marriage, we see a picture of the communion between Christ and His bride, the Church." Jesus is also the great Bridegroom of His Bride, the Church.

Our Scripture texts for today give us a little sampling, the Old Testament from Isaiah, for example. Speaking of the salvation that the LORD brings, the prophet writes: *"you shall be called 'My Delight Is in Her,' and your land 'Married'; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."*

Or consider the antiphon to our introit from Song of Solomon, not a song merely of marital love, but a picture of the love of God for his church.

Or consider Paul, not in our Epistle, but in Ephesians, as he speaks to wives and husbands. To wives, he says: *"submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord ... as the church submits to Christ ..."* (Eph. 5:22, 24). And to husbands, Paul says: *"love your wives, as Christ loved the church"* (Eph. 5:25).

Making the point explicitly, Paul quotes Moses: *"Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh";* and he drives the point home, saying: *"This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church"* (Eph. 5:31-32). Our marriages are meant to reflect — however dimly they may do it — the marriage union of Christ and His Beloved Church.

That also means, that our marriages are to be marriages based on a sacrificial love of husband to his wife, in the example of Christ, for Christ is the great Bridegroom who *"gave himself up for"* His Bride, the Church. The great exchange that Christ accomplished for the church, taking on her sin and punishment, and giving her His righteousness in exchange has meant the sanctification of the Church, and, through baptism, her cleansing; and all this Jesus did, St. Paul says, *"so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish"* (Eph. 5:26-27).

This is the new role that Jesus is taking on as He goes from His baptism to this wedding at Cana; but that means His old role is also changing; and sometimes such changes can mean some misunderstandings.

At this particular wedding, not only Jesus is there, but His disciples are there, too ... and His mother. His mother discovers that they've run out of wine at the banquet. How embarrassing!

Knowing that her son could do something about it, she runs to him, probably still expecting submission to her will. But Jesus doesn't submit; He puts up a bit of

resistance. “*Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.*” Our own Bill Weinrich translates it this way: “*Is my concern also that of yours, woman?*” (Weinrich, p. 296) Putting my own gloss on it, it’s as if Jesus is saying: “my role has changed, Mother. You know who I am. You’ve forgotten your place. You must stop your meddling.”

Now this response does sound a bit disrespectful to our ears, especially calling His mother “woman,” and Dr. Weinrich does suggest it reflects some “tension and conflict,” especially with regard to these new roles, but, he says, it is “not harsh, let alone hostile or disrespectful” (Weinrich, p. 299).

For Jesus’ role is now one of Bridegroom to His Bride, and in marriage “*a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh*” (Gen. 2:24). A kind of separation occurs, and so it has here. Jesus’ concern is now for His beloved bride, the Church. Not that Mary’s concern for the wedding couple wasn’t commendable — it was. It just wasn’t Jesus’ priority now. His bride took priority.

Indeed, how many marriages have failed because the bridegroom didn’t take this “leaving” to heart, or because the mother refused to acknowledge it. Of course, this leaving does not mean abandoning the mother or father. We still love and care for our parents. From the cross, Jesus, too, would show His continued love and concern for His mother, giving her into the care of the Beloved Disciple. But as He hung from the cross, His true priority for His Bride was clear for all to see: it was “for us men and for our salvation” (Nicene Creed).

Of course, Jesus is the compassionate One, and he does have mercy on this wedding couple. He does His first miracle. He changes water into wine — the good wine — thus sparing the couple from shame.

And, if Jesus would do this miracle for this wedding couple — not a part of His purpose for coming — how much more can we be sure of His miracle of our redemption, delivering us from all sin and shame by His sacrificial life given into death for His bride. And how much more does He deliver our redemption by giving to us the best of His wine, and the best of His board — His own body and blood for us for our forgiveness and life.

Therefore, rejoice. Our Bridegroom has loved us, giving Himself up for us, rising back to life for us. He has made us His own in the waters of Holy Baptism. And come, eat and drink, for He gives us now the fruits of our redemption in the festive board of His table — His body and blood for us. Living in the loving embrace of our Bridegroom, let us His Bride live for Him.

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