

**Lord, Give Me a Sign:
January 16, 2021**

Remember last week...
When I talked about...
Jesus being revealed...
To the world...
By the star...
And through the wise men...
And all that.

I don't know if you saw the Facebook post...
On the Joy Lutheran page...
From Helen Hambidge this week.

But she watched the worship service online...
And you know how I used the baby reveal confetti canon... **[1 Reveal]**
To talk about how the star revealed...
The baby Jesus.

Anyway...
Since Helen watched the service online...
She has been getting bombarded with advertising...
About gender reveal products.

Which cracks me up.
It seems to me...
That they may not be familiar...
With their target audience.

Helen is retired... and assured me...
That she is NOT interested...
In gender reveal products.
At this point in her life.

But that... is the world...
Of modern advertising.
Technology responds so quickly...
To our comments.

BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING... and listening.

A few weeks ago... our coffee maker died...
We talked about getting a new one.
That very same day...
There were multiple advertisements...
On my social media accounts...
And various emails...
Advertising the virtues of certain specific coffee makers...

Through the wonder of technology...
The marketers are infiltrating...
The nooks and crannies of our life.

Back before the proliferation of digital everything...
There was a marketing principle called... **[2 Rule of 7]**
The Rule of 7.

It was developed by movie studio executives...
Way back in the 1930s.
They discovered... that customers...
Needed to see and hear about their latest and greatest movie...
Seven times... before they actually came to see the movie.

The idea is...
It takes seven interactions...
To become familiar with the product and the business...

It's all about creating...
A sense relationship with the potential customers.

One marketing website said...
The message to the buyer...
Must reach them at least 7 times...
To get a conversion.
CONVERSION...
Interesting choice of words...

Anyway...

Would you like an example...
Of how repetition creates...
A sense of relationship...

Ok.

One time... not too long ago...
I started a confirmation class...
By looking at the kids...
And singing...

You take I-25...
To exit 235...
AND...

Five miles west...
To the tree farm.

That's right...
We all know...
That jingle is an ear worm...
And it's everywhere.

[VIDEO - TREE FARM]

And now...
It's stuck in your brain too... You're welcome.

Now... the reason I'm talking about...
The Rule of 7...
Is because...
It's relevant...
To what Jesus is doing...
In the gospel of John.

The gospel lesson we have... **[3 First Sign]**
Is usually called...
The Wedding at Cana.
It is the first of seven miracles...
That have become labelled...
The seven signs... of Jesus.

Now before we go any further...
We should think about...
The function of a sign?

I think the most basic idea is...
A sign gives us information...
That points to something else.

Like if you happen to be driving down the highway... **[4 TWODOT]**
In the great state of Montana...
And you see **this** sign...
You know that you have to get off the highway... at that point...
If you want to visit TWODOT Montana...

BUT if you drive past the sign...
That has implications too.

If you don't stop in TWODOT...
You'll never learn...
That the name of the town...
Comes from a rancher...

Good Old... "Two Dot" Wilson...
Who branded his cattle...
With one dot on their hip...
And one dot on their shoulder.

That way those no-good rotten cattle rustlers...
Couldn't very easily steal the cattle...
And modify the brand.
Because it was in two different places.
On the animal.

Pretty smart.

Anyway... that's all part of the function of a sign. **[5 First Sign]**
It shows you the way to go...
To learn more.

To experience more.
To engage with whatever...
The sign is pointing to.

That's exactly what Jesus did in this lesson.

This miracle that he performed...
Wasn't really about saving the dignity...
Of a wedding couple...
That ran out of booze...
At their reception.

The miracle that was performed...
Was really a sign...
Pointing to something...
More significant...
More important...
More vital to the life of the whole world..

So listen.
There are three things...
I would like to point out...
About this story.

That reveal the significance...
Of what happened on that day.

First off... the words that begin the gospel lesson. **[6 Third Day]**
ON THE THIRD DAY.

Those are really significant words...
In the life of Jesus.

Every single week...
When we gather together...
In this church...

And when other Christians...
Gather in their houses of worship...
Wherever they are...

We all confess our faith... and most of us...
With the words of the Apostles Creed...

And in the second part...
The second article of the creed...

We say...
I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,
 who was conceived by the Holy Spirit
 and born of the virgin Mary.
 He suffered under Pontius Pilate,
 was crucified, died, and was buried;

he descended to hell.

The third day he rose again from the dead.

And you know... how Jesus was killed on a Friday...

Then that next day...

That second day...

There was nothing.

Jesus was dead.

And buried in a tomb.

The world was silent.

God was silent.

Absolutely nothing happened.

It was completely void and empty...

Then the third day dawned.

The world was filled with new life.

Where there was loss...

And pain...

And emptiness...

And death...

And sorrow...

God changed everything.

God transformed our lives.

On the third day...

Jesus was raised from the dead.

And life and hope... were born again.

See some theologians believe...

This gospel lesson...

The Wedding at Cana...

Is foreshadowing.

The resurrection of Jesus.

You know...

Even though it was basically... a good day...

The bride and groom...

Were joining their lives together.

All the family members and friends...

Were in the middle of celebrating...

And it seemed all good...

BUT something was wrong.

Running out of wine...

Was not part of their plan.

There was a deficit...

An emptiness...

That was just about to ruin everything.

But then.
Jesus showed up.
Did his sign.
And the wine flowed...
Like new life.

The presence of Jesus changed things.
That was a sign...
To point to the power of Jesus.

And that all happened...
On the third day.

Secondly... **[7 Jars]**

The jars Jesus used are important.
They were the same jars...
That were used by the Jewish people..
For ceremonial rites... washings of purification.

You know... the obligation they had...
To wash their hands before...
They ate together.

They had to make sure...
Not that their literal hands were clean...
Even though that's always a good idea...

They washed to make sure...
Their hearts were clean.

The jars were part of the law...
An action that was required...
In order to be clean in the sight of God.

The jars were empty.
So Jesus told them to fill them with water.
Then he transformed the water into wine.

But in the process...
He transformed the purpose of the jars themselves.

They were changed...
By the power of Christ...
From this obligation...
This sense that if I don't do...
Exactly what God wants me to do...
All the time...

If I don't follow all the rules.
If I'm not perfect...

Then God will not love me.
God will not be pleased with me.

And more than likely...
God's displeasure...
Will lead to bad stuff...
Happening in my life.

There was a direct connection...
Between keeping the law...
And having a good life.

BUT Jesus changed these jars...
That were filled with the waters...
Of obligation...

Into vessels that were filled to the brim...
With the wine of abundance.
Which was freely flowing...
To all the people...
Gathered in that place.

They didn't have to PROVE...
They were worthy of the blessing...
That Christ was giving.

They were there.
In the presence of Christ...
So they were blessed.
That's it.

No other requirements.

This was a sign...
That Jesus was going to fulfill the law.

Then finally...
When Mary asked Jesus to help the wedding couple.
Jesus said something very odd.

He said... **[8 My Hour]**
My hour has not yet come.

He meant that he had a purpose...
And a mission in this world...

He was headed somewhere...
And it wasn't time yet...
For him to reveal...
To the whole world...
Who he was ultimately going to be.

BECAUSE even though he did this magic trick...
And it was neat.
The magic trick wasn't the point...
Of Jesus coming to be with us.

It was just something he could do.
It wasn't the end goal...

John wrote...
Jesus did this,
The first of his signs,
In Cana of Galilee,
And revealed his glory;
And his disciples believed in him.

See... that's the purpose of the sign.
Just to point us the right direction.
The disciples understood this.
They saw the miracle...
Of water changing into wine...

And somewhere...
In their hearts...
Or minds...
They started to believe...
That Jesus was something more...
Than what they had expected.

There are six more signs... **[9 Seven Signs]**
That are going to point us...
In the right direction...
For our faith journey.

Jesus will heal a child.
Jesus will give a man the ability to walk.
Jesus will walk on water.
Jesus will feed the 5000.
Jesus will give sight to a man born blind.
Jesus will raise Lazarus from the dead.

Each one is a sign.
Each one is a miracle.
And we will go through...
All these stories in the year to come...

But if you want...
You can skip to the end.
Because the ultimate goal...
Of the miraculous works of Christ...

Isn't to be impressed...
By some kind of God magic.

Isn't to say...
If Jesus could do this...
For this couple about to run out of wine...

Just think of what Jesus could do for me.

Just think of how...
Believing in Jesus...
Could lead to prosperity...
To the good life...
To miracles.

But God doesn't want our worship...
If all we are after...
Are signs and miracles.

All 7 of these signs..
Have the exact same purpose...
They are directing us to Jesus...
Who is the Savior of the World.

They are pointing us...
To the ultimate Glory of God...
Which is fully revealed...
When Jesus is dying on the cross.
For our sake.

That's where these signs are leading us.
And we ought not to forget.

Janet and I were talking... **[10 A Sign]**
As I was getting ready to write this sermon...
And I said... ugh...
It's the wedding of Cana... again.

And since I've been a pastor for almost 29 years...
I've probably preached...
On this story...
In worship services...
At least ten times.

And every once in a while...
I focused on this bible story...
In some of weddings...
Where I presided.

So... more than ten.

What I'm trying to tell you is...
I've heard this story over and over again.

I've talked incessantly...
About this story...
So many times.

And I face the danger...
Of taking it for granted.
Of not listening.
Of not hearing.

Of not understanding.

That this story is just... a sign.
A beautiful powerful sign...
Pointing the way...
To the One who loves me...
And gave his life...
To make me whole.

And repeating this story...
Points again to a God.
Who loves you...
So deeply and profoundly...
That he gave up and will give up...
Everything...
To give you life.

And no matter...
How many times...
We hear this story.

And no matter...
How many times...
We think we understand.

And even though...
We don't want to admit it.

We need a sign.
We need this story.
We need something that reminds us...
And directs us...
And point us...
To the unending... overwhelming...
Love of God.

Which is revealed to us...
In and through...
The love of Christ.

Thanks be to God.
Amen!