Grace and peace from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

 Today we are going to talk about a wedding celebration that Jesus and the disciples attended in Cana, which is in Galilee, northeast of Nazareth. The wedding was on the third day which has he hidden meaning of the resurrection. Mary and I visited Cana on our trip to the Middle East, but we did not purchase a bottle of Cana wine while we were there. The vintage was very old I imagine. We left that for other pilgrims. In Jesus time this area, as was Jerusalem was under Roman rule but was inhabited by Judeans. To understand today’s narrative, it is important to understand the honor and shame culture in Jesus’ time. Their focus is on honor and pride, where members are typically defined by their community’s opinion or perception of them. People feel shame if they don’t meet the expectations of the group. The group could be one’s peers, family, social level, village etc. It is important to observe the group’s expectation of you. If you fulfill your role, you are valuable. Gender was a part of this with the man as the head of the basic unit of the family and they are responsible to advance the family via victory in the public sphere. The woman would have their familial role where things like having a male child would bring honor to the family but as a husband’s property basically to follow the male’s lead. One must do anything they can to maintain one’s honor and to avoid public shame. An extreme example is honor killings. In Roman society respect for the family was based primarily on such things as wealth, education, rhetorical skill, family pedigree, and political connections.

 In today’s narrative Jesus’ mother Mary who attended the wedding told Jesus they have no wine. Two things about this statement. Mary is turning to Jesus, the male figure, to take care of this situation since by tradition it is felt Joseph had died -we don’t find this in scripture but Joseph carried out the wishes of God by raising his Son. She also doesn’t want the family shamed because they have no wine. When Jesus called his mother woman Jesus is indicating the messianic separation from his mother. Jesus is now on a mission to save the world, and familial relationships cannot get in the way. Here, even though Jesus is carrying out his mission to save the world he takes time to celebrate. This signals to us when we are working to carry out God’s mission in the world, we should take time to celebrate. We can celebrate on February 2nd when we have the fish fry, where we enjoy the bounty that God has provided, served by those who have a mission for others and add to our food pantry to help us carry out our mission for the glory of God to feed the hungry in the community. It is a win-win. We enjoy God’s bounty and eat well as were serve to feed others. It also allows us to invite others to share in this bounty. He could have denied his mother’s request yet he saved the honor of family and performed his first miracle, which John calls a sign. It is unlike other miracles he performed the other signs were about healing. In a sense, this was pre-emptive action, saving humiliation and keeping the family from dishonor. The other signs restored people so they could participate in worship and are restored to society. There was a common belief that evil spirits cased the infirmary, but Jesus does not directly say that but did drive out evil spirits in some instances heals by forgiving sins and curing the illness.

 Weddings in ancient times were announced just before the wedding day and typically everyone in a village would be invited. After the couple was married the family would put on a feast for the guests and this could last for a week. Zeyad, our refugee foster son, while we were at a buffet, said this wouldn’t work in his home country of Yemen because everyone would come and wouldn’t leave until the food was gone. That is how weddings were. The family was expected to offer food and drink during this feast until the end. To run out of something before then would bring shame to the family. Wine was a staple drink in the Mideast. To run out of wine would be more than embarrassing, it would break the unofficial rule of hospitality. When we visited folks in Jordan, because we were with the family of our exchange student, we were considered family, and it is customary to serve something to eat and drink. Instead of running out of food or drink they would bring a cup of coffee which meant the visit was coming to an end. Hospitality was over the top. We had to learn not to finish what we were eating or drinking or else more food would be put on our plate or our glass or cup would be filled gain. To cries of Esayaeh which means enough they would say something like it is healthy as they filled our plate or cup. Also, part of the unwritten rules of hospitality is wedding invitations were delivered by hand the week of the wedding. This was busy time for the family, but they were expected to do this. We and the bride drove to a relative in another city to deliver the invitation and of course were invited in for a visit. The parents actually asked family members to hand deliver these invitations to distant locations. The little sister of the bride made the observation they could simply post the wedding to Facebook which was loudly and abruptly made clear this would not happen.

 Back to the wedding in today’s narrative. There were six stone water jars that were used for ceremony cleansing and held about 175 gallons of water. When the wine was gone Jesus’ mother said they had no wine. Jesus responded by asking why this was of concern for him or for her and told here his time had not yet come. Mary didn’t necessarily ask him for a miracle but was asking Jesus to solve a problem. Joseph by tradition was thought to be dead so she naturally would turn to her eldest son for a solution. At this time, she perhaps recognized Jesus was more than her human son and told the servants to do whatever he asked. The servants complied when Jesus told them to fill the jars to their brim of these large jars, for an abundance. Jesus then instructed them to take some to the master of the banquet. When he tasted it he went to the bridegroom and said everyone brings out the choice wine first and when the guests have had too much to drink they bring out the cheaper wine. But you have saved the best for now. He had no idea that Jesus had turned the water into wine. But this is indicative that Jesus wants us to have the finest. Our life in Christ is better than life on our own. God revealed his glory. The messianic message is clear that he has outlined a new world order, symbolized by his attendance at the wedding, his messianic distance from his mother ad providing for us what the couple and more than what we need, God’s mazing and abundant gifts. Jesus is more than Mary’s son as this sign showed his power over nature signifying that he would go about his ministry by helping other, speaking with authority and giving a personal touch with those he has come to save. The disciples became believers because of this sign. John ends his writing as he tells us that Jesus did many more things but also, but if they were written down he supposes even the whole world would not have room for the book that would e written. If you had been present and saw Jesus turn water into fine wine would you believe? Would it help the others miracles “SIGNS” Jesus did?

 Here’s the thing. We can think about being married to God because are chosen by Christ in love and bonded until death in mutual service and joy. Sunday becomes our wedding feast where we remember the vows at our baptismal font and we celebrate by taking in the real presence in Christ and the wine (or juice=grape juice was invented in 1869 by Tom Welch-Wech’s grape juice) For Christians, human marriage becomes a welcome metaphor for our relationship with God, and, conversely, the ideal relationship with God informs what we hope Christian marriage to be. For us marriage isn’t a sacrament but rather a model of how we faithfully follow Christ. Come and celebrate during communion today. Then we break bread together in the Fellowship Hall and go out into the world and share hospitality as we invite others into our family. We are not too distant from the divine. I love that e use real bread and give an option of juice or wine for communion which can help us to realize God’s presence in the created earth. Amen.