

Epiphany 2 / January 16, 2022

John 2:11

“This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested His glory. And His disciples believed in Him.”

“He manifested His glory and His disciples believed in Him.”

The miracle at the wedding in Cana is the first sign of Jesus’ glory in John’s gospel. In the gospel of John, Jesus gives seven signs to express or manifest His glory. We might simply call them miracles. However, it is important to note that John never refers to Jesus’ signs as ‘miracles,’ as do the other gospel writers. John calls them “signs.” What’s the difference between signs and miracles? The difference is not so much in their substance as it is in their intent, particularly the intent of the gospel writers. The Greek word for miracle is “Dunamis,” which is the root for the English words, dynamic, dynamo and dynamite. It means power! Miracles are expressions of God’s power. Miracles reveal Jesus as the Son of God! Jesus’ miracles challenge us to consider, both who He is and what God is doing through Him. The purpose of a sign is to open our hearts to receive God’s power in grace and forgiveness, by believing in Jesus and receiving Him as our Saviour.

When Jesus calmed the waves and quieted the storm on the Sea of Galilee, Luke says the disciples were afraid and amazed. That was a miracle. That was sheer divine power. It caused them to reconsider their assumptions and question their thoughts about Jesus. It compelled them to ask, “Who is this man?” The most powerful forces of nature obeyed Him instantly. The sign of the water becoming wine was more subtle. There was no overt display of power. The water became wine without a word of command and without any special effect to mark the change. There was a before and an after, with nothing to see in the middle. One moment it was water, the next it was wine. It was a miracle, but there was no thunder and lightning, because its purpose was to open the disciples’ hearts to believe in Jesus. It was a sign by which the disciples’ eyes were opened, not to question, but to see Jesus’ glory. The sign revealed Jesus’ glory and the disciples believed in Him.

We may experience an overt display of divine power in a miracle once in our lives or maybe never, but we all receive signs. The word of the gospel is a sign of God’s favour, through which the Holy Spirit creates faith in our hearts, sustains it and brings it to fulfillment in everlasting life. Baptism is a sign of God’s grace, through which He adopts us as His children and by which He daily and continuously washes away our sin and cleanses our spirits with the blood of Christ. Holy Communion is a sign of God’s favour, through which He nourishes our faith with the bread from heaven, fills our hearts with His Holy Spirit, forgives our sins, gives us the promise of resurrection and a foretaste of the feast to come.

These signs certainly have a miraculous component, but there are no special effects to overpower our senses, fill us with awe and cause us to wonder. They are constant signs of assurance, by which Jesus manifests His glory in a more subtle manner, so that like the disciples we too may believe in Him. Jesus reveals His glory in the word, through the water of baptism in in the bread and wine of Holy Communion, so that with His disciples, we would receive Him as our Lord and believe in Him as our Saviour!

How many signs do you see in any given day? Our lives are filled with signs. Stop signs and yield signs are at the corner of almost every street. Streets are lined with signs advertising businesses and promoting products. Signs advertising local businesses are superimposed on the playing surfaces of distant arenas, so you can see them when you watch on television. Athletes wear signs on their uniforms advertising products. How do you feel about signs? Some signs get in the way. Big bill boards block our view! Some signs inform us. Road signs tell us where to go, so we take the correct exit and don’t end up in Winnipeg. Some signs warn us of danger, “Road closed bridge out, detour.” Signs show us a way of escape in case of smoke, fire or power failure. We may not know much Latin, but we all know an exit sign when we see one. Signs inform us. Signs warn us. Signs command us. Signs challenge us. Signs get in the way and annoy us. Signs offer hope and provide a way to safety.

Jesus’ signs served a similar purpose. Jesus’ signs informed people as to the nature of His being and the purpose for which He had come. They showed Him to be the Christ, the Son of God, our Saviour. His signs challenged people to consider their thoughts and question their assumptions and expectations, both about the Messiah and the kingdom He would establish. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. He backed up His claim by doing the work of the Messiah, in accordance with the signs foretold by the prophets; healing the sick, restoring wholeness to the disabled, raising the dead and preaching good news to the poor in spirit. When John sent his disciples to ask if Jesus was the one to come or if they should expect another, Jesus told them to look at the signs.

Everyone saw the signs, but not everyone read them the same way. Some people believed He was the Son of God, for no one could do such signs, if God was not with Him. Others saw the signs, but refused to believe Him. They said He did these things, not because He was the Son of God, but because He was in league with the devil. John says Jesus gave these and many other signs so that we would believe that He is the Christ, the Son of God that believing we would have life in His Name. Jesus continues to give signs in His word and in the sacraments. His signs challenge our assumptions. His signs convict us of sin and show our need for forgiveness. His signs call us to faith and give us the assurance of forgiveness. His signs reveal His glory as the Saviour, so we may believe in Him and have life in His Name.

What was the greatest sign? Water into wine was something special. It must have been the best tasting wine this side of heaven. It saved a couple of newlyweds from a great social embarrassment at their wedding feast. Healing the official's son in Capernaum and restoring wholeness to the paralyzed man at the pool in Jerusalem were life changing experiences for those who received them. One man was saved from death. Another was restored to a fuller life. Five thousand hungry people were happy to be fed and were amazed when they realized all that food came from five loaves of bread and two fish. We can't imagine the feelings of the man born blind when he experienced sight for the first time at Jesus' command. But what could compare with raising Lazarus from the grave? Nothing is as final as death. No barrier is as unbreachable as the grave. Jesus gave the greatest display of His power and the most powerful sign of His glory, by calling Lazarus to come out of the tomb. This was a sign for us that one day Jesus will call us and all believers to come out of our graves and stand in His resurrection.

Those seven signs were all great and its beside the point to grade them from lesser to greater. But there was an even greater sign! However, the greatest sign didn't look like a sign at all, let alone a miracle! It was totally without trace of power, divine or human. The sign of which I am speaking is the cross, upon which Jesus suffered and died to pardon and sanctify you and I. This was the great sign to which every other sign pointed.

To the human eye there was no miracle. There was no power in this sign; only weakness, unbearable suffering and death. There was no glory for the eye to see; only blood and water from His pierced side. But this was the greatest sign, because it reveals the miracle of God's love. It underlines and highlights the most beautiful words in the gospel of John, where Jesus said, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son so that whoever believes in Him would not perish, but have eternal life.*"

The cross was the greatest miracle and the greatest sign. It was the greatest display of divine power, because in this sacrifice Jesus made atonement for your sin, my sin and the sin of the whole world. It is the greatest sign of Jesus' glory. In this sign Jesus offers forgiveness in time and life in eternity for all to receive. In the sign of the cross, Jesus reveals the fullness of His glory as Saviour and the purpose for which He came; our salvation. In the sign of the cross, Jesus reveals His glory in divine love, so that we would believe in Him as our Saviour and Lord. God open our eyes to see Jesus' glory in the signs, so we may believe in Him as our Saviour and receive the gifts of forgiveness and life in time and for eternity! In Jesus' Name. Amen