

Here's Your Sign!

“This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him” John 2:11.

At the place, where I used to workout, there was a collection of cardio machines along one of the walls. All the machines faced toward the inside of the facility and across the way you could see the other wall. On this wall across from the cardio machines, there was a TV that played a slide show on a loop, just like the TV's we have out in Ebenezer. The slides that made up this loop had various quotes and facts to inspire people to workout and realize that this was a good decision for their lives.

Well, as I would do cardio on one of those machines throughout my years of working out there, I became quite familiar with the information in that slideshow. There was one slide that always made me chuckle. You know how people often talk about looking for a specific sign to give them direction or an indication of what they should be doing? Well, this slide spoke to people looking for a sign to workout. The slide went something like this: “Looking for a sign to workout? Here it is,” and in the picture of an actual sign were the words, “Go workout!” Not sure that's the sign we were always looking for, but there was no doubt a sign right there in front us telling us what to do.

Back in the Christmas season and now even more so in this season of Epiphany our Gospel readings over these past several weeks have clued us into the signs that people were looking for concerning the Messiah, that promised Savior from the line of David. There was great hype at Christmas about the sign to the shepherds of the child born in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. Then at the start of Epiphany, there was the star that was the guiding sign for the magi as they traveled to Jesus.

Just last week, we heard about the people's expectation growing as they wondered about John the Baptist, if his actions signified that he was the Messiah. Instead, John the Baptist shared with them that his actions still pointed to the One who was to come. We heard affirmation of these words from John the Baptist, as the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove and the voice of God the Father marked Jesus as the very Son of God, the long-promised Messiah.

Well, once again, in our Gospel reading we have another sign. Yes, again, this sign reveals the Messiah like the ones before it. But there is something different with this sign than all those mentioned before it. This sign was the first, the beginning, of all the signs that Jesus did. Unlike the signs before it, Jesus turning water into wine didn't simply say that He was the Messiah, this sign and the many to come after *showed* that He truly was the Messiah!

This event is truly significant! No longer was Jesus merely living with a reputation that was spoken about Him. He was living up to this reputation with deeds that revealed works no one but the Messiah could do. As God in the flesh, He was certainly showing His authority over creation, but even more telling was the context in which He chose to begin His signs.

Changing water into wine at a wedding feast, wasn't simply a neat party trick to get Himself warmed up. With this action Jesus pulls the past and future into Himself in that present moment. The Old Testament images of God wedding Himself to His people, of feasting with the finest of wines, were becoming reality. Still, this was only a foretaste of what Jesus had further come to reveal as He would later speak of the wedding feast that would have no end.

This moment in Jesus' ministry proclaimed that God hadn't forgotten or abandoned His Bride, His people. He had come to purify and redeem His people. This sign and the others that would follow were to remind His people, to remind His Bride, of His love and mercy that had been rejected. These signs were to proclaim His faithfulness to His Bride, His people, who had been shamelessly unfaithful towards Him. This was a sign to renew the faith that had been lost.

In that moment, faith was restored. We are told in our Gospel reading that because of this very sign, the changing of water into wine, Jesus' disciples believed. Their faith was strengthened. As we'll hear in the weeks to come, Jesus' faith building ministry will grow and gain momentum in many places with many people. But as He moves towards His greatest sign, His death and resurrection, many people will remain stubborn unconvinced by His signs. To many in His earthly ministry, Jesus was just like that workout sign, right there in front of them, but not what they thought they were looking for.

The same can be said for us today too. God's signs haven't gone away, but so often their impact is lost on us. Hearing about Jesus' beginning sign, changing water into wine, sounds like a childish fair tale in such a scientific age. Our day and age attempt to make seeing God's signs of His design in our lives, His fingerprints on all that He has made in our lives, meaningless, leaving behind only a life of sheer chance and chemical reactions. We, ourselves, have gone out seeking signs from God completely overlooking and even ignoring the very signs He has written down for us in His Word, the Bible.

Yes, like that workout sign that was right in front of me, we look at God's signs right in front of us and tell God that's not the sign we have in mind so we'll look for something else. Like many of the people during Jesus' earthly ministry, we struggle to believe the signs God has chosen to give. They're not always logical. They're often not easily explainable. They're not typically what we would expect or choose. They constantly challenge what has become commonplace and accepted in this sinful world.

Yet, by God's grace, amid our ongoing personal doubts and denials, these signs of God aren't covered up and buried! His signs remain written so that even now, today, in this moment, we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the very Son of God, and that by believing we might have life in His name. God remains faithful to His Bride, His people, His Church, to us, so that He might forgive and restore us from our current unfaithfulness. He pours out His Spirit to renew and strengthen our faith, to open our eyes to the work He continues to do for us here in this time and place.

Truly in this present time, our Lord continues to act to show us that He is our Messiah, our Savior. Jesus by His Word, takes His greatest sign of all, the cross and empty tomb, connects it to ordinary water to purge our sin infested lives and gives us eternal life in His name. By this same Word, connecting that same great sign of the cross and empty tomb, He also takes ordinary bread and wine placing His Body and Blood in, with and under so that our sins might be forgiven and our faith strengthened by a foretaste of the wedding feast to come.

In fact, it's this greatest sign of our God, His death upon the cross and resurrection from the tomb that fuels our drive to recover God's other signs in this life that have been corrupted and covered up by sin through the years. Christ's Word and work, affirmed as true and certain by His death and resurrection, restore the value of life and marriage as God designed it. For it is for life from conception to resurrection, for your life and mine, that Christ died and rose. For it is for His Bride, the Church, for you and for me, Christ died and rose, so that marriages in this life might cling to and know what God truly intends that relationship to be and all other relationships might recognize the love, mercy, forgiveness and sacrifice God has given to us to live out with each other.

Dear friends, God's signs are right here in front of us! They are written down for our benefit, for the strengthening of our faith, for our salvation! These signs of God, from water turning into wine to Christ's death and resurrection are the signs that we need. They are signs that show us the God we can't fully understand, but the God who fully understands us. They are signs that assure us that our God loves us despite how our own sin has broken, battered and bruised us and those around us. They are signs that place immense value on each of us as His dear children. Come, see, listen, believe and know the glory of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the signs that He has written and placed right in front of you! Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Dan