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## From the Pulpit: December 3, 2023

Third Sunday of Extended Lent

The Reverend Dr. William A. Evertsberg

John 2:1–12

*The New O Antiphons, III: O Prince of Life, Bridegroom to the Bride...*

*O Prince of Life, Bridegroom to the Bride,  
Host of Heaven's perfect marriage feast,  
take pity, Lord, on this world's wives and husbands.  
Help them love and listen. Help them wait  
while you sand off rough edges and sore points.  
Help each to see the other's special beauties  
and know the spouse anew, a precious gift.<sup>1</sup>*

The Scripture Lesson this morning comes from *The Gospel of St. John*.

*On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the person in charge of the banquet." So they took it. When the person in charge tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), that person called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.*

At the very beginning of his ministry, Jesus attends a wedding in Cana of Galilee, which is about four miles up the turnpike from his hometown of Nazareth. His 12 best friends and his mother also attend.

They run out of wine. This is serious. Weddings in first-century Palestine were seven-day festivals in a land and a time when calories were all too few, so to run out of food and drink was a serious *faux pas*.

Now listen to this. We learn so much about the dynamics between a 45-year-old mother and her 30-year-old son. Mary hunts down Jesus among the other 150 wedding guests and says, without explanation, "They've run out of wine." Now, Mary is not the MOB. This is not her party. Why does she think this is her problem to solve, and then why does she hand it off to Jesus?

Maybe as a favor to the MOB and the FOB, she just wants him to go down to the local Binnie's and come back with six more cases of wine. Or more likely, maybe Mary knows better than anybody else that Jesus, coming straight from God, is a chip off the old block and has God-like power, which by the way, turns water into wine every autumn on the hillsides of Burgundy and Sonoma.

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<sup>1</sup>Diane Tucker, "Forty new O Antiphons," *The Christian Century*, November 30, 2020.

But Jesus is having none of this. “Why is this my problem?” he says to her. Typical dynamics between a mother and her son. I’ve probably told you this before. When my son was a teenager, he had a standard response when his mother would ask him to do something. She would say, “Michael, your room’s a mess,” or “Michael, there’s six inch-es of snow in the driveway,” and he would always say to her, “And you’re telling me this because?” In other words, “Tell somebody who cares. Tell somebody who needs this information.”

Mary says, “Jesus, they’ve run out of wine.” And Jesus says, “And you’re telling me this because?” And now look at this: she completely ignores him, and turns instantly to the sommelier and says “Do whatever he tells you.” Mary is the Mother of All Jewish Mothers. “Do whatever he tells you.” And you know the rest of the story. Jesus turns 150 gallons of common well-water into a rich, red burgundy from the hillsides of France which would get a 98 from *Wine Spectator*.

In the Gospel of John, this is Jesus’ first miracle. This is his debut on the stage of history. Why? People are lame and leprous and dying and hungry, and Galilee is occupied by a harsh and hated alien empire, and Jesus wastes his divine power getting wedding guests drunk. Why?

Well, that’s a good question, and I’m glad you asked. John tells us that Jesus did this to reveal his glory, to tell his disciples and his mother and everyone else exactly who he is and what he can do.

The wedding at Cana in Galilee has become a symbol of what life will look like in the world to come, the fulsome, gladsome, over-flowing, abundant life in a world where God is fully, finally in charge.

“Mary knows better than anybody else that Jesus, coming straight from God,”

Fifteen times, the New Testament refers to the relationship between Christ and his church as that of a Bridegroom to a Bride. St. John of the Apocalypse says, “And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, as a bride adorned for her husband.” To the one who came down at Bethlehem so long ago and will come again at the end of time, Vancouver poet Diane Tucker prays: “O Prince of Life, Bridegroom to the Bride, host of heaven’s perfect marriage feast, take pity on this world’s wives and husbands. Sand off their rough edges.”

Prince of Life, she calls him. Just so, no? Because that’s who he is when he sands off our rough edges. **Life** is what we are making when we treat our partners and our children and our parents like Christ the Bridegroom treats his Bride, the Church.

Home is where we learn to live and learn to love. You may have graduated from New Trier High School and Stanford University and Northwestern Law, but if you didn’t learn to live and love first in the home you grew up in, you don’t know nothin’. Home is the classroom in which we learn the art and science of love. It is where we are schooled either in compassion or in bitterness.

*New Yorker* writer and Pulitzer-Prize winner Kathryn Schulz has written the most wonderful memoir. It’s called *Lost and Found*, because in the same year, she **lost** her father, and she **found** the love of her life. Kathryn adored her parents. They were intellectuals and witty raconteurs. Kathryn’s sister once said to her, “Our parents gave us a **love of ideas**, and also the **idea of love**.<sup>2</sup> Have you given your offspring the idea of love? Do they know how to treat others? When love comes along for them, will they know it when they see it? None of us are perfect. We fail. We stumble. We forget. All of us have rough edges.

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<sup>2</sup>Kathryn Schulz, *Lost & Found* (New York: Random House, 2022), p. 153.

At my last church, a splendid woman named Pat Case was my nursery school director. She was my Amy Johnson. Every morning at the beginning of the school day, just like Amy, she stood in the driveway for drop-off so she could greet every child by name.

Pat tells me that one morning she greeted a precocious young man with “Good Morning, Charles! How are you today?” And he replied, “I’m fine, Mrs. Case, and how are you?” And she said, “I’m fine, Charles.” And then he said, “Mrs. Case! Guess what?” “What, Charles?” “At breakfast, Mommy threw a box of Cheerios at Daddy!”

Two hours later, at the end of the school day, Charles’ mother gets out of an SUV the size of an oil tanker and comes skipping into the building as cheerful and chipper as can be, all decked out in her tennis whites and dripping with gold and diamonds, and when Pat asked how she was doing, she replied, “Oh, I’m great, Mrs. Case. I just couldn’t be any better.”

When Pat told me that story, the first thing that occurred to me was that appearances can be deceiving. You never know what goes on behind the closed breakfast-nook doors of our apparently placid All-American homes. The second thing that occurred to me was that throwing a box of Cheerios at your husband might not be such a bad way of expressing your marital vexation. On the one hand, a box of Cheerios can’t do any real damage; and on the other, it probably gets your point across. It’s better than tossing, oh, let’s say, the toaster, at him.

It’s not all sex and cuddles and drinking cocoa together around the bonfire at the Christmas Tree Farm and opening presents together on Christmas morning. On the other hand, it can be life’s greatest gift. The days are hard and the nights are cold and life can fling all manner of crud at us. So it’s good to have a companion who walks the way with us, someone who has pledged her troth to you and will never leave your side. “With my body, I thee worship,” we used to say, but that was too carnal for delicate Christian ears, so we stopped saying it.

Jimmy Carter met Rosalynn when she was three days old. His mother, a nurse, delivered her at birth. They didn’t hang out together; Jimmy was three years older. But Jimmy’s sister Ruth was Rosalynn’s best friend.

Ruth had a photo of her brother on her bedroom wall, and when Rosalynn saw a picture of Jimmy in his Navy dress whites, she developed an instant and serious crush on him. “I fell in love with that picture,” she said. Jimmy must have graduated from the Naval Academy by that time, so Rosalynn was, what, 16, 17, 18 years old?

“None of us are perfect. We fail. We stumble. We forget. All of us have rough edges.”

Jimmy Carter was a Lieutenant in the submarine corps of the United States Navy. There is a Seawolf-class submarine called the USS Jimmy Carter. He was governor of Georgia and President of the United States.

When he left the White House, he was 56 years old, 30 years younger than either of next year’s presumptive presidential candidates. When he **finished**. Forty-three years of post-presidency. He has been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Nobel Peace Prize. He worked tirelessly for peace in Palestine. He built thousands of homes for Habitat for Humanity.

When you ask Jimmy about his proudest achievement, he will tell you, “The day Rosalynn said she’d marry me.”<sup>3</sup>

“O Prince of Life, Bridegroom to the Bride, host of heaven’s perfect marriage feast. Take pity on this world’s wives and husbands. Sand off their rough edges. Open their eyes to each other’s special beauties.”

That’s what Jimmy Carter taught his Sunday School class in Plains, Georgia, for 50 years.

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<sup>3</sup>Rick Rojas, “The Carters’ Hometown Mourns for the Love of a Lifetime,” *The New York Times*, November 20, 2023.

**—Prayers of the People—**  
**The Reverend Katie Snipes Lancaster**

Emmanuel, God-with-us, we await.  
In love with this world  
we await the newness of your promises.

For the day when your presence on earth  
is more embodied,  
more alive with the peace that passes understanding,  
more awake to the deepest joy of being fully alive.

And yet even now,  
we sense the web of love that is your promise fulfilled.

The promises are here, met, received,  
even as we wait, wish, wonder,  
and feel as if the perfection of your kingdom is  
delayed.

For those who can or could or would hope  
to stand at the brink of surrender,  
who wish with their whole being  
that weapons of war,  
could be turned into tools for thriving, we pray.

For those who set one foot in front  
of another in the long work of climate care,  
longing for a zero-carbon future,  
every hoof, foot, fin, and wing  
precious in their sight, we pray.

For the ones we love, near and dear,  
who mourn, who with blind desire,  
wish for one more day to tarry there  
with their loved one who has passed beyond the veil,  
we pray.

For the trembling visionaries of the world,  
our president and our House in frenzied vote,  
for our world's poets and story weavers  
who brave the truth with words,  
for the hospital leaders who manage  
the dwindling supplies in war torn places,  
for those entirely hidden whose lives mark  
and move this world in ways unknown, we pray.

God, give us the blind desire to draw near to you,  
to live as you live, to seek what you seek.

Let our lives in their own way begin  
to mirror your dream anew.

Let us live as advent people,  
longing for what is possible  
when your kingdom is given a chance to reign.

And now we pray for your kingdom in the way that  
you taught us, O Christ... Our Father...

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