

**Foundation for the Good Life**

**The story in today's gospel reading is simple and well-known. Jesus visited some people who were celebrating their wedding. A common event; so common in fact that the names of the couple are not mentioned. The wine got used up (some say because Jesus brought those fishermen with him) and Jesus compensated the bride and groom with a generous amount of new, and very fine wine.**

**So what's the point of this story and why is it in the Bible? Why did he turn water into wine (while many Protestant churches have been trying to turn it back ever since)? If you read the many Bible commentaries about this passage they speak of marriage, its mystical meaning, the relationship between God and God's people, and they ask questions like, "Why did he call his mother 'woman'?" or "What did that saying 'my hour' mean?" By and large these commentaries are helpful and their interpretations can bring us greater understanding of this passage. Yet there may be more. Many of the commentaries don't talk about the two who were married, though Jesus obviously came for them.**

**After his baptism, Jesus came out of the desert and into the jungle of this world to begin his ministry. The Gospel of John says that Jesus began that ministry at a wedding. At a wedding of all places . . . why begin there?**

**Was it to indicate, in a very clear way, where the foundation of his ministry was to begin? When Mother Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize some years ago the journalists who surrounded her asked: "What is, according to you, the way to a lasting peace?" She answered them in four words only, "A good family life." The reporters seemed disappointed, though I believe she was right.**

**The quality of human life depends essentially on how families work out. Human life itself depends on it. What were the two in Cana hoping for when they got married? What are couples in Kern County hoping for in marriage? What are church families hoping for?**

**Deep down I believe people are hoping to find life. Life from each other and life for each other, life for their children and life from their children. Life in helping, comforting, boosting, stimulating one another, not only at the inception, at birth, but all the way through the slow process in which a family grows up. If you're a responsible person, you must consider how your actions will affect your descendants four generations hence. What are we doing today that influences and guides our children or grandchildren, who will in turn pass it on to their children and grandchildren? What choices are we making today that will have ramifications for future generations?**

**I once received a flyer from a group of parents concerned about drug and alcohol abuse among teenagers. They were asking parents to sign a pledge that their homes would be alcohol and drug free, and supervised to be kept that way, whenever teens were gathered there. The flyer reminded me of the kind of world and community in which we live. There are a lot of homes and families that are not good environments in which to raise children. All the more reason for us to be here!**

**Recent surveys show that teenagers who are regular church-goers are less likely to engage in "at risk behavior" than non church-goers. Studies also show that the key component in church attendance, for both boys and girls, is their dad. It seems that the father plays a key role in setting the example for behavior among children. I am grateful for the men in this congregation who provide such positive examples of Christian manhood. Men at church play a part in supporting, encouraging, and thanking the single mothers in our midst, who carry on the difficult task of raising children without the father in the home.**

**All of us must pray for this church family we call First Church. We must pray for our children and youth to know Christ as their Lord. Some of you may be thinking, "I don't have any children in the home, so this doesn't apply to me." But isn't this your family in Christ? Are not the children here also your children in Christ?**

**We must pray that the variety of spiritual gifts given to the members here for the building up of this family, are displayed and well employed. We are all under one Spirit, and Christ expects us *all* to work together for his good and glory. Aren't the gifts you've been given by Christ needed here? Remember last week how I said we all shared in Christ's baptism? That means we all can share in his potential and power. God is generous with his gifts and power, if we ask.**

**Now I must speak plainly here: one of the greatest examples we can give our children is how we handle our money. First of all do we handle it wisely so as to provide for the needs of children and family? But more than that do we handle it wisely for Christ? I have so hoped and prayed for many years that all the members of this congregation would tithe to the Lord's work, and teach their children the spiritual value of tithing. A tithe, of course, is 10% of one's income. Sadly, this is one area where most Christians are fearful – more afraid to let go of what they have than they are excited about the great spiritual gain they *could* have.**

**Imagine a nice-looking restaurant that serves a buffet lunch. You've seen it advertised and driven by the place numerous times, so finally you go in. There is the long buffet table; but you find only a few selections widely scattered on the tables and most of them picked over; all of them cold.**

**I wonder if many of us don't often operate that way in life. Feeling constantly short on time, short on sleep, short on money, short on energy, we must spread**

**around among so many commitments the limited resources of ourselves that we often skimp and shortchange those around us. We pour the cups of our relationships and obligations only half-full. We can't save the best for last because the best got chopped up all along the way.**

**At the other end of the spectrum, however, there is the hostess that has prepared and provided more than enough for everyone. "Tell me when to stop," she cheerfully says, as she pours more drink and ladles more food than you can consume. The table is covered with platters filled with food. She comes around with an assortment of desserts, and though you can't imagine eating another bite, it all does look so good. You ask her to cut just the smallest slice of a certain dessert for you, only to discover that she doesn't know how to cut anything small. No one will walk away hungry from her table!**

**That's the picture that the Bible gives us of God's table. For in all things, we discover that he is more than generous. The apostle Paul paints for us a picture of the generous and overflowing work of the Spirit. And Jesus' miracle at Cana is a testimony to the bountiful, unstinting way God works. We could say our God is the Lord of the brim -- for what he fills, he fills to the top, and more!**

**Each day we are influenced and tempted by all kinds of messages from media and society. Not all are helpful or healthy -- most are directed to what are essentially selfish ends. At the very least we can use a dose of Christ's positive affirmation once a week. But better yet is a daily booster of the spiritual vitamins Christ can offer through a time of active fellowship with other believers, as well as prayer and Bible study. We have our Wednesday Night Refuel because we recognize that it is necessary to refill our spiritual tanks more than just on Sunday. If the world around us is sinking in immorality we don't have to drown.**

**Only a life dedicated to following Jesus and living the habits of discipleship will save your life and your children's lives. The love of Christ has to be acted out within the family. If we don't make a stand to live in Christ, we will simply be carried downstream by the secular society around us.**

**When the family focus is on Christ and Christ-like living -- I mean your family and our family, the church - then unconditional love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control can grow. We have Children's and Family Ministries here because, with God's help, we want to foster Christian homes of integrity; the foundation for life. We want to support vital youth ministries for the same reason. We have a counseling center here, because we want to help families when family problems arise. We have been called to lay this strong foundation of Christian living, here, in this land. We must not be content with a pile of bricks at which we throw a dab of mortar. We put much attention and committed much of our resources to building our new Narthex. Let us do the same as we diligently build a congregation that fosters**

**good families and Christ-like living. Let's commit our resources to such a worthy project; not forgetting to call upon the generosity of our Lord. It is through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that we can truly say, "Jesus is Lord."**

**We all know that it is much easier to talk than to do. Planning and implementing are two very different things. In *Pilgrim's Progress*<sup>1</sup> Christian says of the character named Talkative, "He talketh of Prayer, of Repentance, of Faith, and the New Birth; but he knows but only to *talk* of them." As it says in I Corinthians (4:20) "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power."**

**Jesus began his ministry at a wedding because the quality of human life depends essentially on how families work out. Jesus has asked us to join him in doing what is right and good, each and every day. Then, like the wine that He delivered at that wedding, the gifts God will give us in this life will overflow and get better and better.**

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<sup>1</sup>John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, (1678), Christian Library Edition (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour & Co.), 85.