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Pastor:
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Sunday, March 21, 2010

Sermon Texts: Isaiah 62: 1-5
 Psalm 36: 5-10
 John 12: 1-12
 I Corinthians 12: 4-11
 Ephesians 5:2-18; 6:1-4

Sermon Title: "When Christ Is Invited?"

Sermon Topic: Are you reading the signs?

Sermon Purpose: To teach the unimaginable grace we receive when we invite Christ into our lives.

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Sermon Prayer: Father in heaven, Author of joy and happiness, who makes the heart glad with song; Hear us this morning as we unite with one voice, blending together the thoughts of those who have worshipped You for so many years; with the innocent, searching thoughts of our children. May Your Spirit join ours in this celebration of love and joy, of worship and witness, of sacrifice and service. We pray through Christ our Lord. Amen.

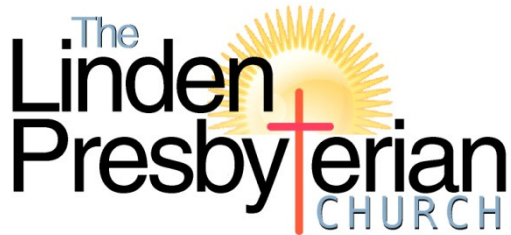
What does today's society consider to be "family values?" What do we, as a congregation, consider to be "family values?" [Let them answer.]

In the days when Jesus walked this earth, "family values" meant bringing honor to your parents, teaching your children respect for people and traditions, sharing in the life of the community, and defending the faith in which you were raised. This was what we might call "a package deal:" family, community, and faith.

Did you ever hear anyone say, "Be careful what you pray for because you just might get it?" It's good advice and true! Here's another bit of wisdom to consider: "Be careful when you invite Christ into any situation because He'll come and make changes you never imagined."

You can be sure that the people present at the wedding reception in Cana of Galilee could tell us something about that. John records that Jesus and His mother were invited to the affair. Well, Jesus went, but apparently, He arrived somewhat later than the others. (It's something like we experience, in today's society, where many of the invited guests go to the **reception** but not to the **church ceremony** - and **still** claim to have been to the wedding. The truth of the matter is that they only attended the **party**, but never **saw** or **heard** the exchange of vows, or the music, or witnessed the actual wedding event. Those who only see fit to attend the reception are putting themselves on the fringes of this new family's life, they're not permitting themselves to become a part of the actual **marriage** because they have no idea what took place during the ceremony and they have made no commitment to help this couple make the marriage work. The point of the matter is that the wedding **ceremony** is the event without which there would be no **reception**!)





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In the case of the wedding at Cana, Jesus' late arrival was no social faux pas because the festivities at a wedding reception - in that time and place - lasted a full seven days. At any rate, by the time Jesus and His disciples arrived, the hosts had run out of wine. When Mary saw Jesus and His friends, she said to her son, "They have no wine." No doubt with a twinkle in His eye and a smile on His lips, Jesus said something like "N. M. P!" ("No my problem!"), or "So, what do you want me to do about it?"

Of course, Jesus was being playful with His mother. He knew that He would help the hosts out of the predicament because the groom was considered family – and family could always be counted on in times of need. His mother knew this, too. She probably gave him one of those "mother's looks" and she turned to the wait staff and said, "Do whatever He tells you."

Noticing six large stone containers standing nearby, Jesus then instructed the servants to fill them with water. When they had done that, Jesus told them to take a sample of the contents and give it to the steward in charge.

We can imagine how the steward examined what the servants had brought him and noticed that it didn't smell like water at all. It was wine! He took a sip, smacked his lips, broke into a smile, and ordered it served to the guests. Then, he sought out the bridegroom and said, "You know, at most weddings the hosts serve the good wine first. And when the guests can no longer tell the difference because of what they have consumed, then they serve the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until near the end." Can't you just envision the bridegroom laughing and telling everyone what Jesus had done? Instead of an embarrassing disaster, the affair turned out to be a joyful occasion.

That is probably the message that John wants to get across in this story about Jesus. John is saying, "Invite Christ and you can count on some kind of change taking place. And you can count on irrepressible joy invading your life in all of its aspects."

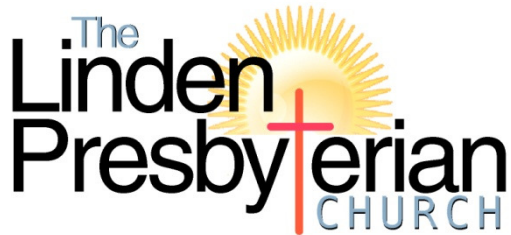
An Englishman who kept his family in poverty because of his alcoholism was persuaded to invite Christ to help him in his battle against his addiction. Finding strength to conquer his problem, slowly but surely he was able to edge his way out of poverty and dependence upon public assistance.

Later on, someone asked him if he thought Jesus really did turn water into wine. He answered, "I know this. Christ turned alcohol into food on our table, and clothes on our backs, and a decent place for my family to live."

Think of the joy that man found! I really think this is what John wants us to know about the first miracle Christ performed. In those days, the sweetness of wine was a symbol of joy. Christ's presence and action brought joy. That's the message John has for us.

When Jesus is invited into our lives, into our homes, into our businesses, He changes our sorrow into our joy, defeat into victory, troubles into triumphs. Christ comes, when invited, and - in John's words - manifests "His glory."





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Just as that young couple in Cana, so long ago, invited Christ to their wedding, it's important to invite Christ into our homes from the very moment they're established.

There was a startling headline in a recent newspaper. It read: American 'nuclear family' may be on the verge of vaporizing. This was the first paragraph:

"The conventional model of American family life - a married couple with kids and a stable home - is on the verge of becoming the exception rather than the rule, the U.S. Census Bureau reported." (The Arizona Republic, Aug. 30, 1994, pg. A5)

The article went on to say that only 51 percent of American children live in two-parent families whereas in 1970 there were 66 percent living in what we had previously considered "traditional family structures."

It appears that there are powerful forces at work tearing away at the foundations of our families. Such things as the decline of church influence, the great divorce rate, enormous numbers of children being born out of wedlock, absentee parents (mothers, as well as fathers), struggling single-parents, and the like.

Please don't misunderstand. It's not my intention to criticize. I'm simply pointing to the disasters we're all facing because of the disintegration of what we have come to know as traditional family life. Without the influence of healthy integrated families, we won't really solve the frightening crime problem no matter how much money we put into the endeavor or no matter how many laws are passed. And, without the influence of strong, loving, and moral families, how can society have high ethical standards?

The New Testament is very concerned about the quality of life in our families. Examine the 5th and 6th chapters of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. Those chapters reveal pertinent instructions for the Christian family. Here are just a few lessons found there:

"... Walk in love as Christ loved us..." (5:2)

"... Immorality and impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you..." (5:3)

"... Walk as children of the light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)." (5:8-9)

"... Understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit." (5:17-18)

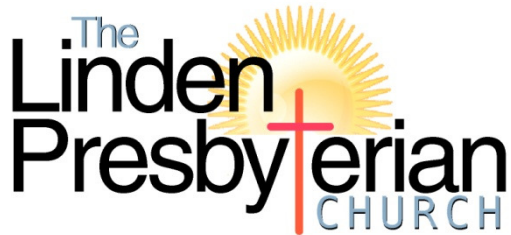
"Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ." (5:21)

"Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and your mother'..." (6:1-2)

"Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord." (6:4)

The point is that the Church and the Bible offer us the blueprints we need for successful family living. Joyful and meaningful family living begins with making Christ the head of our homes.





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Many of us remember Bishop Fulton Sheen and his weekly-televised Bible Study and message. I remember him saying on more than one occasion, "It takes three to get married: a bride, a groom, and God. Yes, and it takes the same three to stay married."

So, Jesus was invited to the wedding at Cana and something was changed: water into wine, disappointment into joy, and a lack of something into the provision of something.

That's always the case. Do you recall the Capernaum official who invited Christ into his home? The mere invitation brought about the healing of his son. (John 4:46 ff.)

Mary and Martha invited Jesus to their home when their brother Lazarus was ill. Lazarus died - and was even buried in the tomb, but when Jesus got there, Lazarus was given life again.

Consider also, the two disciples on their walk to Emmaus. They were unknowingly joined by the resurrected Christ. They didn't recognize Him, but something about Him fascinated them. As they approached the village, Christ appeared to be continuing onward. But they invited Him to stay with them, since it was almost evening. Jesus did so and - as they dined - He took bread and broke it, and He was made known to them in the breaking of that bread. (Luke 24: 13-35)

My friends, who knows what gift, what blessing Christ may have for us this very day? We will discover unimaginable grace as we invite Christ to stay with us.

Let us pray:

Lord Jesus, come into our lives, our homes, our hopes, and our dreams and change them according to God's Will and according to Your love. Enable us to be vessels of Your power and of Your peace, as we struggle to serve in this world. And, by Your Spirit, enable us - as the living witness, Your Body, the Church - to lead our society to truth and to hope. This we pray as servants, as children of God, and as witnesses to the power You have had in our own lives. Amen.

