

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Epiphany 2

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On-time delivery

Three days later, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. ²Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. ³When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My time has not come yet." ⁵His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶Six stone water jars, which the Jews used for ceremonial cleansing, were standing there, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim. ⁸Then he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." And they did. ⁹When the master of the banquet tasted the water that had now become wine, he did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew). The master of the banquet called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the guests have had plenty to drink, then the cheaper wine. You saved the good wine until now!" ¹¹This, the beginning of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

—John 2:1-11

We human beings are not the most patient creatures. Our natural impatience is compounded by our culture and our circumstances. Here in America we are used to having choices and getting what we want. The rise of Amazon Prime illustrates Americans' desire for fast delivery. Order today and get free two-day delivery—or faster in many cases. Today we hear lots of people talking about supply-chain issues. Grocery store shelves are bare because of "supply chain issues." Contractors can't get building supplies delivered because of "supply chain issues." Prices are climbing because of "supply chain issues." The reasons there are supply-chain issues are outside the scope of our sermon today, but the frustrations that we Americans feel because we cannot always have what we want exactly when we want it is real. This is a new experience for many of us here in the Land of Plenty.

No matter how impatient we might be, the fact is life doesn't always deliver on time according to our schedule. Complaining to the manager and threatening never to shop at that store again will not make products magically appear on the shelves. Yelling and screaming and throwing a tantrum at the customer service counter won't get anyone booked on a flight that's been canceled. Getting hot and bothered because the extension cord is tangled up won't unravel it any faster. But when we learn to persevere and wait patiently on Jesus, things are different. With Jesus there is always on-time delivery, and when Jesus delivers on his time, he delivers nothing but the very best.

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. A wedding! Nothing more special! A time of joy and celebration, the happiness of a man and woman being joined together under God. A time of beauty—they say that a woman never looks more radiant, more beautiful than on her wedding day. How quickly sometimes the joy of that special day gives way to struggles and challenges, as the new bride and groom together face the real world. In this case, the problems started even before the wedding was over. Before the feast was even complete, there came the word, *"They have no more wine."* No big deal, we might say? Oh, come on, remember what it's like at a wedding. You know how the families of the bride and groom want to make sure that every last detail is worked out so that everything is absolutely perfect and everything comes off without a hitch! And now they had run out of the main beverage. What else was there to drink? Water? Goat's milk? There were no soft drinks or punch bowls. The feast could not continue without the beverage. The party was a bust.

So in came Jesus' mother, Mary, with the announcement, *"They have no more wine."* I don't know about you, but I've always been a little surprised at Jesus' response to his mother. *"Woman, what does that have to do with you and me?"* Jesus replied. *"My time has not come yet."* (Throughout the centuries translators have struggled to render Jesus' words in this sentence in the nicest possible way. The original Greek says something more along the lines of, "What is it to you and me, woman?") But as I've studied this more, I've come to realize: Mary's request was presumptuous. She was trying to advance God's timetable, and perhaps even get Jesus to reveal his glory before the time was right. She wanted on-time delivery from Jesus, but she wanted it according to her own time schedule. Fortunately, Jesus' words must have helped her realize that she was pushing things, because with her next statement she again submitted herself to the will of Christ. *His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."* Even though Jesus was Mary's son, he was still Mary's Lord, and her submission to the will of the Son of God was the right thing for her to do.

I wonder, do you and I expect on-time delivery from life? Do you expect that Jesus is going to give you anything and everything you want when you want it? Or have you learned to be patient and wait on the Lord? Be honest. My friends, patience is not my strong suit, and I really wonder how many of us here have truly learned to persevere under any circumstance and wait patiently for the Lord to give us what he wants us to have in life in his own way and in his own time. We are so ready to be done with this pandemic. Enough already! When is this

going to be over, Lord? The answer is: It will be over when the Lord decides that it's time for it to be over, and not a moment sooner. Then the next tribulation will come along because God is merciful.

One of the hallmarks of youth today is impatience. When am I going to get out of school? Why do I have to listen to my parents? I can't wait until I have a car so I can do what I want when I want to. People today just *expect* that the world owes them something. Graduates from college just *expect* that they're going to land a high-paying job, and that life is going to be served up on a silver platter. What do you mean God wants me to wait until I'm married to have sex? No sacrifice, no waiting, no hard work, no back-breaking labor, just give it to me, and give it to me now. Isn't it true today, that my generation has to have in four years what it took our parents forty years to achieve, and what our grandparents never saw in a lifetime? Today we plan our lives all out according to our little Google Calendar schedules and career plans. We're going to be married for three years and four months before we conceive our first child, and then we're going to have a boy and a girl and quit. And along the way if we can't afford something we'll just put it on the credit card. And as the debt piles up, we'll put everything on hold—even our relationship with God—while we work all the overtime, we can get our hands to pay for the good life. And maybe even wonder, God, how did you let me get into this? Where are you when I need you? Why aren't you delivering solutions for all my problems in life?

My friends, I might draw this caricature of our life and times that doesn't apply to everyone, and it might almost seem funny when see how silly it is. But this is a serious problem that we all struggle with. And at its root is a very serious sin: it's the sin of presumptuously telling God how he should operate in our lives or simply telling him we're going to run our own life on our own schedule. It's the sin of taking matters in our own hands instead of simply trusting the Lord. It's wrapped up in the sin of greed, materialism, living for now instead of looking to the life of the world to come. The prophet Jeremiah wrote in the book of Lamentations, "The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD" (Lamentations 3:25,26). The Psalmist wrote in Psalm 130, "I wait for the LORD, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning" (Psalm 130:5,6). Why does God want us to wait on him? Because he wants to build perseverance and character, and he wants to teach us to hope: so that when everything's going well in our lives, we praise him instead of celebrating ourselves and our accomplishments, and so that in the darkest times of our lives, when everything in life seems like it's falling to pieces— financially or emotionally or however—we can have the confident hope that the Lord will not abandon us.

The Bible is full of examples of people whose circumstances the Lord had laid upon them forced them to wait upon the Lord. We think of people like Job, whose afflictions brought him closer to his Savior; or Abraham, whose wanderings as a stranger and a pilgrim taught him that here on earth we have no enduring city, so that he looked forward to being with his Savior God in heaven. Or we think of the Apostle Paul who had this thing he called a thorn in the flesh, some sort of affliction that was sent to test him. And though he prayed and prayed to have it taken from him, God said, "My grace is sufficient for you, my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Or even just the people at Cana, who along with Jesus' mother had to learn to wait until the right time.

Jesus came through at the wedding. Right on time, he delivered. You know the story. *Six stone water jars, which the Jews used for ceremonial cleansing, were standing there, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.* When the time had come for Jesus' glory to be revealed, *Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim. Then he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." And they did. When the master of the banquet tasted the water that had now become wine, he did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew).* A couple of things to note here. Did you catch the size of each of these stone jars? John tells us that each held from twenty to thirty gallons. And there were six of them. The core curriculum math tells me that comes out to between 120 and 180 gallons of wine that Jesus made! This exposes the fallacy that consuming anything alcoholic is sinful—which of course some people teach today. If that were so, then Jesus would have been causing people to sin by being an enabler. It's not the use of alcohol but rather the abuse of alcohol that's sinful. The Scriptures tell us that *"Everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer"* (1 Tim. 4:4,5).

The other thing we note is that Jesus made a huge quantity of the *best wine*. The master of the feast himself noted the quality when he said to the bridegroom, *"Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the guests have had plenty to drink, then the cheaper wine. You saved the good wine until now!"* When Jesus comes through with on-time delivery, he always comes through in the best way, and he gives us something that's even more and even better than what we dare ask for. We wonder if this was such a big party that so much wine was needed; perhaps the whole town was invited and even people from surrounding villages. Possibly so. I like to think of all that wine as a wedding present, something that that groom and his bride would be able to share and enjoy for a long time afterward as a remembrance of the day they invited Jesus to their wedding.

The Lord Jesus has already come through for you with on-time delivery. Scripture tells us, "When the time had fully come, God sent his son . . ." (Galatians 4:4) to be your Savior. With on-time delivery, Jesus revealed his

glory in his great epiphany, by performing this miraculous sign, so that his disciples put their trust in him. When everything was just right according to God's timetable, Jesus went to the cross as the sacrifice for the sins of the world. And precisely on time, exactly according to the fulfillment of God's promises, on the third day Jesus rose from the dead to prove that death has been destroyed and heaven is waiting for God's people. You can be assured that right on time, according to God's plan, you will hear his call from this world of tears and sorrow, and you will be delivered right on time into Christ's heavenly kingdom.

I don't know what things you're waiting for and hoping for in life, what problems you face that need to be solved. But recognize that your timetable may not be God's timetable. When God's hour comes, he will come through for you, with perfect, on-time delivery. And when Jesus delivers, it's always the very best. Amen.