

Day One

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today's devotion again comes to us from Lutheran Hour Ministries.

"SIGNS"

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee ... When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." ... Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." ... When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, (he said) "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." This, the first of His signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested His glory. And His disciples believed in Him. (John 2:1a, 3, 7a, 9a, 10b, 11)

When God called Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, He gave him the ability to do three signs so people would know God had sent him. Moses' stick could turn into a snake; his hand could turn leprous; and he could turn water into blood.

I don't know about you, but I am infinitely grateful that Jesus' first sign was a happy one!

I suppose it makes sense if you think about it. Moses was coming to speak to a king who refused to let his slaves go, in spite of plague after plague, disaster after disaster. It makes sense that the opening "signs" Moses gave would be ominous, scary, threatening. They were a foretaste of the things to come.

Jesus' first sign is also a foretaste of the things to come - both for Him and for us. The wine He made for this village wedding foreshadows the wine of the heavenly banquet in the kingdom of God. It is a sign of celebration to come.

But it is more than that. We can hardly avoid being reminded of the Communion wine - of Jesus' blood, shed for us on the cross. And so this sign reminds us of the price Jesus paid to free us from death and evil - and of the joy we have with Him as we share His resurrected, eternal life.

THE PRAYER: Dear Jesus, please bring many more people to celebrate with You at the heavenly banquet. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

- * Do you like parties? Why or why not?
- * Have you ever had to deal with a crisis at a celebration or party you planned?
- * If God had told you to choose Jesus' first miracle, what would it have been, and why?

Lenten Devotions were written by Dr. Kari Vo.

Day Two

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today's devotion again comes from Lutheran Hour Ministries. It is based on Matthew 8:18-20.

"BEING UP FRONT WITH US"

Revolutions are not easy. Taking part in one is rarely clean or nice. This is also true for the revolution Jesus was beginning - the revolt against the devil, the breaking of his power over the whole human race and the beginning of our glorious freedom as the children of God.

But first comes the suffering. And so anyone invited to take part in such a revolution needs to be aware of what they are getting into.

Take the man in the Bible passage above. "Teacher, I will follow You wherever You go," he says. But was he still saying that after Jesus warned him that it would involve homelessness? I hope so. But we don't know, do we? Possibly because Jesus wants us to consider the same question, though in a larger sense

What does following Jesus cost for us? It may not be homelessness or persecution or loss of family for you. It might be something more subtle - a failure to be promoted at work, maybe, because your conscience won't let you use the tactics that other candidates do. It may mean taking someone into your family - a relative who falls on hard times, or a student who suddenly loses grant funding and can't afford an apartment. It might mean giving that old car to a single mother who needs one, rather than trading it in.

As a Christian believer, you have Jesus living in you, and He shows Himself through the things you do. There is a cost - plenty of annoyance and frustration and burdens to bear. But ask those who are serious about following Jesus, and they will tell you - they'd never trade it for anything else.

THE PRAYER: Lord, live through me, and help me to be glad to serve You in the ways You set before me. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

- * Have you ever made a commitment too quickly?
- * What has being a Christian cost you?
- * What has being a Christian given to you? Be as specific as you can.

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Day Three

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today's devotion from Lutheran Hour Ministries is based on Luke 4:16, 22:1a, 28-29. It is a surprising reception in many ways.

“A SURPRISING RECEPTION”

What a weird reaction - to go from “all spoke well of Him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from His mouth” to trying to throw Jesus off a cliff! And in such a short time, too. Something certainly got them riled up.

And if we look at Jesus' sermon, we can see what it was. They were happy as long as Jesus was proclaiming God's mercy for them. But then Jesus started proclaiming God's mercy to foreigners! He said, “But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when ... a great famine came over all the land, and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian” (Luke 4:25-27).

The people really didn't want to hear that. Surely, God belonged to Israel only! They were so enraged that they tried to murder Jesus.

It seems ridiculous - and yet we see people behaving like this today, too. We behave like this any time we refuse to share God's blessings with others in need, just because they are different from us. Against this attitude Jesus urges us, “Freely you have received; freely give” (Matthew 10:8b, NIV). God's mercy is for all the world - not just physical blessings but the best gift of all, His Son Jesus Christ, our Savior, who died and rose for us.

THE PRAYER: Dear Lord, give me a generous heart to share Your love with everyone. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

- * When do you find it easiest to share? Hardest?
- * What gifts has God given to you? List as many as you can.
- * How has Jesus helped you to bless other people?

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Day Four

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

“FREE FROM SHAME”

A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give Me a drink.” ... The Samaritan woman said to Him, “How is it that You, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?” (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water.” (John 4:7, 9-10)

Do you ever wish you could just start your life over?

I think that's the way it is for a lot of us. Take the woman Jesus met at the well in Samaria. She was there to get water - but not at the normal time, at the start of the day. She was there in the heat of noon, when nobody else was there. Why? Well, probably to avoid her neighbors. Better to suffer from the heat than from the sting of malicious tongues.

You see, she had been married five times, and was then living with yet another man - possibly someone else's husband. It's pretty clear that her life was a mess. And when she saw Jesus sitting at the well, she braced herself for another battle. Because Jesus was clearly a Jew, and she knew full well the Jews were prejudiced against Samaritans.

But Jesus hadn't come to heap yet another burden on this woman. He had come to take her burdens away - to set her free. He spoke to her gently, treating her with respect, making it clear He knew her history and still valued her in spite of it. He offered her the living water of the Holy Spirit, who plants faith in us. And she was so amazed that she ran back to tell her neighbors all about Him.

You may be at a point in your life where all you can see is a mess - regrets, wrong turns, shame, broken relationships. Jesus sees past that. He sees you, and He wants to set you free. He offers you living water so that your thirsty soul will be satisfied. Let Him give it to you.

THE PRAYER: Lord, give me this living water so that I may be satisfied in You. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

- * In what situation does water taste the best to you?
- * Have you ever avoided people? When?
- * When do you feel most thirsty for a drink of Jesus' living water?

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Day Five

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today's devotion again comes from Lutheran Hour Ministries. It is based on Luke 9:51-56.

“WRONG-HEADED—AND PRECIOUS”

I have some sympathy with James and John. They saw Jesus insulted, and they wanted to avenge Him. No doubt they felt very holy and righteous about it!

But Jesus rebuked them. They didn't see what Jesus saw clearly - that He had set His face to go to Jerusalem to die, to be nailed to a cross for the very people who were insulting and rejecting Him. For all their wrong-headedness, the people in that village were precious to Him - so precious that He would lay down His life to save them. He had no intentions of burning them up!

This is the story I try to remember whenever one of my own enemies does something horrible - whenever I feel the desire to pull out my handy-dandy flamethrower and rid the world of them. I hear Jesus' voice in my ear, saying, “I died for them, too, you know.” At which point I whine, “Aw, Lord ...” and put my vengeance away.

You are precious to Jesus, for all of your wrong-headedness. And so are your enemies - even the worst of them. Give it a try - pray for them. Even if you have to grit your teeth.

THE PRAYER: Lord Jesus, help me to deal with (person's name here) in mercy, remembering that You love that person enough to give Your life for him/her. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

- * Did you have enemies when you were a child? How did you deal with them?
- * How do you deal with enemies now that you are older?
- * Take a moment to pray, asking God to give something good to one of your enemies.

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