

### **Call to Worship**

Approach with reverence. Approach with joy.

**Approach with laughter. Approach with love.**

Shed false modesty, solemnity, overwrought and overblown language, and all falseness.

**This is our Creator we gather to worship, whose delight in us is shown in every line of our faces, in the best thoughts we have for each other, and in the desire we seek for the Kingdom of God on this Earth. Come. Now is the time for worship.**

### **Prayer of Invocation**

**God of Light, God of Illumination, in your light we see light. Shine your light in our hearts so we may come before you in a new Spirit, with new Hope, and the Inspiration of your Breath in everything we say and do. Surely your presence is in this place and we know it. Be with us through our worship today. Let our prayer and praise illuminate you for the world. These things we pray, Amen**

### **The Word**

John 2:1-12

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. **When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They don't have any wine."**

Jesus replied, "Woman, what does that have to do with me? My time hasn't come yet."

**His mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." <sup>6</sup> Nearby were six stone water jars used for the Jewish cleansing ritual, each able to hold about twenty or thirty gallons.**

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water," and they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some from them and take it to the headwaiter," and they did. **The headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine. He didn't know where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew.**

The headwaiter called the groom and said, "Everyone serves the good wine first. They bring out the second-rate wine only when the guests are drinking freely. You kept the good wine until now."**This was the first miraculous sign that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.**

After this, Jesus and his mother, his brothers, and his disciples went down to Capernaum and stayed there for a few days.

### **Living the Word**

"The Blessings of the Events of our Lives"

We need to begin by defining the word event: a thing that happens, especially one of importance.

They are the moments, big or small, planned or unplanned, that stick with you for a while. They may be a turning point in your life or just a spark in your life that made you laugh or cry.

They are the times that you mark on the calendar and wait for them to come like vacations or they can be the times that became so important that you marked them on the calendar to remember when exactly they happened.

Often, they bring us together and become shared experiences, even though as differing people we may experience them quite differently. You would think that the most blessed events for people would be the ones where we revel in joy. Even so, many other emotional occasions can be a blessing as in a celebration of life which may feel bitter sweet as it is happening. It can also be a blessed event if we survive a great ordeal in our lives – for me, child-birth comes to mind.

I asked the teller at the bank, who I have gotten to know fairly well, what event in her life had blessed her the most? She responded right away with her marriage to her husband. Then she asked me what mine was. At this point you would think that I would have thought this through... So far, I was just processing the topic in a general sense and hadn't asked myself yet. So, my spontaneous reply was the birth of my children. I think in reality the truth of my answer would be the arrival of my children – not exactly the birthing process, though that was certainly an event!

Having said that, I realized that often we don't dissect why one event blesses us more than another. So we need to go back for a minute and list the events of our lives that have blessed us. When I asked you **'what your blessed events were and why or how they blessed you'** these were the responses that I received:

Planned or Spontaneous, each event may include the same list as used for a good newspaper article. You remember, the Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. Who was invited, who came, who just arrived; What was the event; When and Where it happened – These are often found on the invitation if there was one. The why and the how may not have as simple of answers and the other questions. Why and how can be defined sometimes within a history of events that happened before this actual event.

The bank teller ended her response to me by saying that though her children are very important to her, the marriage had to happen for her first in order for the event of them arriving. I found that to be a refreshing answer.

Next, I have put together some of the memorable event stories that have happened in my life as a pastor. Important Note: Pastors are not more blessed than anyone else. Even so, you pay us to spend time with God and building relationships with all of you. And God has called us to point out the blessings to you...

Christmas can be a memorable blessing: I outwardly cringe in the Fall when I first see the red and green decorations arriving on the store shelves, yet there is a spark of blessing as the anticipation and countdown for this great event of the year. God and I put together the Christmas Pageant originally for a District Clergy Christmas gathering. There were 35 pastors and some spouses, who lived into the story with great enjoyment and chuckles. Since then there have been 25 years of pageants in the churches that I have served.

The most blessed moments were a very shy 70-year-old woman who could hardly wait to go home and tell her children that she was the Lead Angel in the Churches Christmas Pageant. Also, the year that Mary was played by a husband who had been brought to worship under duress, yet shared with me that something changed in him while he was on sitting in the midst of the story while it was read.

Christmas Eve is always a holy, contemplative, yet joyful, worship service for pastors. At my first two churches, there was a concern for everyone to be holding a lit candle, so instead everyone brought a candle from home. They were of every size and shape – some very unique in color and décor.

The sanctuaries are traditionally narrow and have windows along the side walls front to back with room for additional tea lite candles. When lit everyone could see their candle and the space was heavenly. After the services, when people came to retrieve their candles a number of them took the time to share why that candle was special to them. In their stories were blessings remembered on that Holy Night.

I love hearing stories. Even more, I am blessed in sharing them and discovering how God's blessings come to us in so many unexpected ways.

Easter blessings have changed through the centuries. At one time it was the day that baptisms happened and new people joined the church. I guess the change to other days of the year came with the phrase 'When would it work best for you and your family?'

Easter Sunrise wasn't always a blessing while I was hired for 3 Easters as a youth ministry, just before I became a pastor. It was too early, and the youth weren't really excited about climbing over a snowbank and then the hill beside the church to stand under the city water tower at 6:00AM to have worship – especially a service in which they had most of the reading parts. I agreed, yet we were blessed by the comradery of accomplishing it together and then getting back into the warm church for Easter breakfast.

Since graduation events have been very different this year, it has brought back the joy and honor of watching youth that I had worked with over a year of Confirmation Classes and now were moving out into the world. As one of the older elders in the Wisconsin United Methodist Church, I have also mentored Candidates for Ministry as they discern their calling from God.

The blessing of knowing that I may have had a small part in this accomplishment of their lives can be considered one of my greatest blessings. This category would include all of those I have had the honor of teaching and mentoring through the years.

Moving on... One birthday story: I was invited to a birthday party for a woman in the hospital. She was turning age 101 and was no longer eating - near the end of her earthly life. Her birthday wish was to have Holy Communion one more time. With her family surrounding the bed, I shared the liturgy, gave everyone their bread cube and little cup of juice and we put some crumbs on her tongue and spoon fed her a couple of drops of grape juice. Her eyes looked into mine as we prayed. And I was very blessed.

Let's talk weddings: I have learned that I am one of the few pastors that really enjoys being a part of this special event. I enjoy them most because they are always unpredictable. No matter how much planning that goes into them, something always doesn't quite meet expectations and it is always a good lesson in who is not in control...

Having said that – my first wedding as a Pastor was my baby sister, Gwen's. I had been a pastor for 6 weeks and was so excited to take part with another pastor in the service. I had my new robe and my notes ready. I love her so much and was so excited to do this for her.

Then there she was so beautiful and on the arm of my Dad, who also looked very dapper. They started up the aisle and I began to cry. It was all so wonderful, yet I had a job to do. So, I looked up at the stained-glass windows above them and whispered a prayer: Lord, take back the tears. Dry them up now. And a faithful God, had mercy and it was gone. After the service I went into a backroom and had a good cry, before I could go to the reception

I have officiated at over 50 weddings. They each have a story to tell and many blessings, yet I'll only share a couple of them: I have been asked many times to officiate at outdoor weddings. What can be more holy than in the midst of God's creation? I have officiated weddings on a mountain, at the lake shore and at people's homes and cabins.

It was a hot July day; the wedding was to be just off the dock a few feet on a pontoon. The bride and groom had been married before, divorced at some point after starting a family and now in retirement had decided to settle down together again. The couple faced the dock and the large crowd gathered there.

Also, on the boat were the boat driver and the person with her button on the tape player (this was 20 + years ago). I had my back to the dock. Somewhere after the vows, yet before the kiss, the bride gasped, I turned in time to see her adult daughter 'mooning' her parents from the dock. I am blessed because I didn't see the moon that day!

Another hot Summer afternoon I officiated a Marine Wedding. At the rehearsal, I assured them that tradition or not, there would be no swords in the sanctuary. Even so, they didn't mention that at 3pm the next day they would be wearing wool, full dress uniforms. and the sanctuary wasn't air conditioned. No one fainted, yet some of them were beginning to weave. That day, I read the words to the service as quickly as I could.

There is only one wedding story in the Bible. From a theological view it is most often told as the story about Jesus' first miracle, turning water into wine. Of course, only a few people witnessed what he did that day.

Even so, if we put ourselves there, we can see other blessings that happened: Jesus had just gathered these fishermen, a tax collector and other small-town young men to begin his ministry. They are all invited to this wedding, along with Jesus' mother.

If you think of the people that are now important to you, do you remember the time when you first got to know them, who they were and about them? The blessing for Jesus that day was getting to know the ones who would follow him through joys and trials, sharing his life and his load as he went. They were surely blessed by him on their life journeys, yet they blessed him over the next three years of ministry as well.

Was he also beginning the relationship between his mother and the disciples in that event, for the future when they would need the support of each other? Think of the connections that you have had with all of the people and how they have blessed your life journey...

At most events emotions are running high. Just like COVID Days going on and on can do. That has become a long running event in our lives and we have to do some searching to find the blessings in that event. They are there in the ways that people are caring about and for others. It is not over yet, and will never be the same normal as we knew.

Reopening is an event to bring some people near and in a new way – together. Reunions - beginning as the world opens up. I know that you can see me here on Sunday morning. But I miss seeing you! Next Sunday, we will still be online each Sunday, and we will begin opening here at the church, 6 feet apart with masks. There is only room for 50 people at this point, and you don't have to be here until you are ready, so we will take it slowly and wisely at this step forward.

I hope you are starting to plan the events for a new day when masks and distances aren't so important... I wish I knew when? And there is always the promised blessing of the reunion with all who have gone before us when we die. Won't that be an event!