

Life Sunday Sermon 2019

John 2:1-11 "If These Jars Could Talk"

Rev. Michael W. Salemink, Executive Director of Lutherans For Life

[www.lutheransforlife.org](http://www.lutheransforlife.org)

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Six stone jars crash the party at Cana. Six stone jars stand guard like sentries. Six stone jars stand for purification. Six stone jars can handle about twenty or thirty gallons apiece. Hard stone, heavy stone, even your eyes can feel it from here. The jars lurk in the shadows. The jars loom from both sides. The jars intimidate the guests. The jars limit the festivities. Six stone jars man post and keep watch.

If these jars could talk, what would they say? If these jars could talk, they would say, "We know your name." They would say, "We know who you are." They'd say, "We've witnessed your secrets." They'd say, "We've seen the skeletons. We've ledgered your indiscretions. We've logged your vices, the private ones. We've studied your immoralities and scrutinized your deficiencies." They'd testify, they'd tattle for all to hear, and they'd say, "You with the greedy fingers, you need purification." They'd accuse, they'd indict before God and everyone, and they'd say, "You with the lustful eyes, you require cleansing."

These jars, they would scowl, and they'd scold to the whole wide world, and they'd say, "You there, with the indulgent belly, you could use decontamination, a good sanitizing." These jars, they'd announce at the top of their lungs, and they'd say, "You there, with the arrogant heart, you call for scouring." They'd bark, "You with the fiery tongue, you must soak, you must drown." They'd divulge, they'd condemn, and they'd say, "You with the raised hands, your turn for the quenching. You there, with the straying feet, your time for extinguishing. You there, you with the snaking spine, you've gotten soiled and stained; you're smearing and smudging everything you touch." If these jars could talk, they'd say, "You're just going to screw it all up again. You'll ruin this one too like always."

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Details may change from age to age. The story’s plot remains the same. Six stone jars still open their mouths, from age to age the same. Life issues confront us just like six stone jars. Life issues, such as experiments on embryos, assisted suicide, and abortion, affect you. These matters where the devil deceives people into viewing death as a solution to distress involve you. These conversations about disability, depression, and dementia apply to you. These debates about infertility, contraception, and unexpected pregnancy; about discomfort and diagnoses; about abuse and addiction and grief and guilt—they concern you whether you like it or not. And that’s exactly why we don’t want to address them, isn’t it? That’s precisely why we’d rather have no big deal made of such evils. We realize that once the fingers start pointing, they won’t be waiting long to take aim at us. We recognize that if the convicting begins, our case and its iniquities will come up too soon.

You have your own indiscretions, don’t you? You have your secrets and skeletons, your mistakes and failures. You’ve gratified your flesh’s appetites and made idols of its urges. You’ve engaged your sexuality with someone other than your spouse. You’ve lent your voice to popular sentiments but bitten your lip when godly truths, tough ones, needed speaking. You’ve contemplated violence against somebody, or even your own body, to lessen his or her suffering, but more so to stem your own. You’ve considered making one neighbor or another go away because they represented an interruption to your whims and a hindrance to your impulses. You’ve exploited sisters for your entertainment and used brothers for your advancement. You’ve neglected responsibilities to family and discarded obligations to community. You’ve ignored pleas for help and overlooked opportunities to save the vulnerable. You’ve dispensed with God’s

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doctrines when they become uncomfortable or even inconvenient. You’ve devised thin disguises and flung flimsy excuses.

So we want our options left open. We intend all escapes left available. But the stone jars keep obstructing us at every turn. Our sidestepping hasn’t succeeded in silencing them. If anything, it has only invited them to object louder. Reality bends, but only so far, and then snaps back and slaps us every time, long before it even appears to approach breaking. The life issues are simple, they are clear, and we know it. “You shall not murder” has no gray areas, no mitigating circumstances, no legitimately different perspectives. The Law demands compliance, restitution, atonement, amends. It isn’t the problem; we’re the problem. It has stone; we have flesh, our rebellious and selfish nature. The Law must get blood, yours and mine, gallons of it, all of it, six stone jars salivating insatiably. And burying our heads in the sand only exposes our necks.

Thank God these jars cannot talk. Thanks be to God these jars can’t talk. Jars can’t talk at all; they just echo. And Jesus has made these jars into bullhorns for His own words. Jesus has made Cana’s six stone jars into His personal public-address system. He didn’t commence these proceedings—“What does this have to do with me, my hour has not yet come,” He insists—but He concludes them. He didn’t start this argument, but He sure makes it His business to finish it. Jesus Christ takes on the six jars, takes them up, and takes them over. God’s Son enters into the plain and the painful, the life-and-death good-versus-evil. He ladles His own wholeness and holiness, spills full-strength extract of heaven’s intervention down their throats, splashes and saturates their mouths with two-hundred proof elixir of almighty “I got this.” Creator Incarnate distills pure mercy directly into the jars’ jaws. Savior invades those jars, inhabits and occupies

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their accusations, endures and abides their curses Himself. He takes responsibility for the ruin, the screw-up, the wreckage.

Then Jesus makes them repeat sweet things. Filled to overflowing, the stone jars proclaim atonement offered. These jars declare amends made, price paid, debts settled. They shout accounts balanced, wrath exacted, punishment satisfied, justice served, sins forgiven, offenders exonerated. Lord Jesus causes six stone jars to ring out a new song of Father's compassion, resurrection everlasting, heavenly kingdom and household inherited. He draws out of these jars promises instead of regrets, joy instead of guilt, hope replacing fear for every feast invitee. He coaxes forth crescendoing tones of sanctity and significance and salvation that embrace each wayward woman as a bride. He wrenches relief and healing, peace and rest, beloved belonging, precious specialness, privilege, and purpose that receive every wandered-off man as a groom. And the jars, the very stone ones, they can't help but holler and herald Him as Immanuel. He rules as Interceder for whom no situation is too tiny, no condition is too trivial, no cause too hopeless or lost. He reigns as Redeemer for whom impossible, terminal, tragic, chronic, or uncertain only means opportunity. For this God Jesus does not change or fail, from age to age unto eternity the same, as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.

With stone steadfastness the jars still echo. Life issues reverberate like jars with reasons for rejoicing from age to age the same. Zygotes and embryos serve as signs of how God intimately and meticulously knit each of us together in His image and for His enjoyment, proclaiming you and all human beings special. Chronic pain and terminal illness remind that He became flesh, that He carried our sorrows, that He reconciled the universe, that He accompanies through the very valley of the shadow of death itself, proving you and every human being

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precious. Dementia and disability, unresponsive and incapacitated cases, resound with how He calls into His household, how He connects eternally to His Church, how He temples bodies with His Holy Spirit, pronouncing you and each human being priceless. Guilt and grief—even from involvement in abortion, assisted suicide, or other decisions toward death—introduce a tune to which God’s grace conducts a completion, as His unconditional love gives you and every human life worth, notwithstanding age, appearance, abilities, or actions.

Procreation and pregnancy recall the baptismal relationship in which He births us into His family and binds Himself as Father to fallen sinners and broken creatures forever. Sexuality and marriage reaffirm the Holy Communion where He offers His body, blood, and life to the benefit and enjoyment of undeserving ones. Difficult conversations, emotional debates, controversy, and advocacy cue the Word of God that lights the road to life immortal. Unanswered prayers, unfulfilled longings, mysteries, and anxieties nod to faith that waits upon God’s times and terms and the hope that rests in His good and gracious will. And though the bitter burns, the sweetness lingers long after the world’s ways and the merriments of men strike their midnight expirations.

For forty years Lutherans For Life has consistently shared it. We have declared God’s truth with courage because we receive it from Him. We have demonstrated Christ’s love with compassion as we reflect it from Him. We proclaim it and perform it because He does so unto us, even for the least of these. We will continue to contemplate and celebrate God’s gift of life in the worshiping assembly. We will keep getting educated together in thinking and talking about God’s gift of life. We will carry on taking action in our congregations and communities. We will deal in Gospel gratitude, not anger; in Gospel gladness, not competing; and in Gospel

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anticipation, not panic. With you, we will treat both our life and our neighbor's as privilege to us and treasure of God. From age to age, be it ages of civilizations or ages of individuals, God never gives up and neither do His people. The party has only begun, and the best is yet to come! Amen.