

**The Good Stuff**  
**John 2 Water into Wine**  
**January 20, 2019**

Today we move from water to wine. Last Sunday was all about water as we remembered how Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan and we reflected upon our own baptisms as the sign of our entry into our new life, how we were, and still are, named and claimed as the beloved children of God. Today that water turns to wine as we look at the first miracle of Jesus, at least as recorded in the gospel of John.

It's important to remember that the gospel of John is just different, at least it is different from the other gospels. Among the many differences from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, is the way that John deals with the miracles of Jesus. Rather than calling them miracles, John calls them signs. And a sign points the way to something or somewhere. Or gives important, essential information. The signs in the gospel of John do both.

There are seven miracles of Jesus that John identifies as signs. The number seven is significant because it is a number of wholeness or completion, as in the seven days of Creation or Joshua marching around Jericho for seven days until the walls come tumbling down. John's description of the seven signs of Jesus doesn't mean that there were only seven miracles performed by Jesus, it means that the seven John highlights are the ones that give a complete picture of Jesus, of who he was and what he came to do.

Changing water into wine at a wedding in Cana is the first sign that Jesus does. The others are healing a Royal Official's Son, healing a paralytic, feeding the 5000, when Jesus walks on water, healing the man born blind, and raising Lazarus from the dead. Taken together, these signs reveal Jesus as the Messiah, as the Son of God, and as the Savior who will give his life for us and then rise from the dead, to bring us new life.

The wedding at Cana is the first sign. It is only found in John's gospel. It takes place on the third day, which means the third day after Jesus called Simon and Andrew and Philip and Nathanael to be his first disciples. Jesus began his ministry with being baptized by John. Then, having been identified as both the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, and as the Son of God, with whom God is well pleased, Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee. Three days after all of this happens, Jesus goes to a wedding in Cana, a nearby village.

Jewish weddings in the first century were week long celebrations. They were as important then, in that culture and society, as they are now, in our culture and society. They were a big deal. Jesus and his disciples were at this wedding in Cana. We don't know why, other than they had been invited. I don't think that we can assume there was any larger reason behind the invitation. Jesus didn't officiate the ceremony. He wasn't invited as an entertainer, with everyone expecting him to do something miraculous. This was before people began to know that Jesus was someone different. It was before Jesus himself believed it was his "time".

No, Jesus and his disciples were just attending the wedding, like all the other guests, including his mother. Unlike the other gospels, where she is identified by name as Mary, she is never mentioned by name in John. In her two appearances, here at the wedding in Cana and later at the foot of her son's cross, where he asks his beloved disciple to take care of her after he is gone, in both of these appearances in John's gospel, she is referred to only as Jesus' mother.

We naturally paid quite a bit of attention to her during the Advent season. Being his mother, Mary is certainly one of the key people in the events of Jesus' birth. Her faithfulness to God, even as God was calling her to do something surprising and unexpected, to be someone (the mother of the Savior) that she was totally unprepared to be, serve as a model for us and for our faith and obedience. It is almost ironic then to

see her at the wedding at Cana as she turns to tables on her Son and asks him to do something surprising and unexpected, something that he wasn't ready to do.

The wedding celebration has been going on for several days. They run out of wine to serve to the guests. Jesus' mother gets him to do something about it. Upon realizing that they are out of wine, she goes to the one person that she (and she alone at this point) knows can rectify the situation. She goes to her son and states the simple fact that "They have no wine."

Note that she doesn't ask Jesus to fix it, she doesn't suggest that he do something about it, she just says "They have no wine." She, as his mother, was in the unique position to force this issue, to tell him that they have no wine and to know that he would know what she meant. Such is the special bond between a mother and her son. She was fully aware that Jesus, her son, would know that there was much more behind her words than the statement of the fact that they have no more wine. She knew that Jesus would understand that she expected him to rectify the situation.

And Jesus, being a good son and knowing his mother well, he knows what she wants, he knows that she expects him to do something about it. But he is not going to let her get away with her request that easily. Now Jesus' response can be seen in a number of ways. It could be seen as sarcastic and disrespectful "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?" or in other words "Mind your own business!" Or it can be seen as playful and teasing. I prefer to see it this way. And I think that Mary does as well.

She ignores her son's protest and actually ignores him altogether, fully confident that he will do exactly what she wants. She instructs the servants to do whatever he tells them to do. Jesus sees six stone jars, each holding about 20-30 gallons. These were used for foot washing for wedding guests or for hand washing between each course of the wedding feast. He has the servants fill them with water and tells them to

take some of the water to the chief steward, the ancient equivalent of the wedding coordinator. And this is where the miracle occurs.

The steward, likely already in a state of panic because he knew that the wine was all gone, finds that the water has turned to wine. Actually, he doesn't know that the water has turned to wine, he just knows that where there once was no more wine, there is suddenly an abundance. And it is not just any old wine, but it is the best wine. The good stuff. The wedding steward calls the groom and praises him for saving the best for last, when typically the best is served first and after it has been consumed and everyone has had enough to drink to impair their judgement, then they try to pass off the inferior wine.

This first sign, or miracle of Jesus, is a quiet miracle- only the servants, the disciples, and Mary and Jesus of course, know what happened. They are the only ones who know that Jesus had turned water into wine. That's not usually the way that we see miracles. We usually see them as LOUD miracles, things that are seen and known by all. But this one was done just for his mother and for his disciples.

That's why it is the first sign that John mentions. It was only meant for his disciples. Think about it, they had just signed on as followers. They knew that Jesus was something special, that John the Baptist had told them how he was not worthy to untie the thong of Jesus' sandals and that Jesus was the Lamb of God. But even knowing that, they had no other reason to believe that Jesus was anything more than an amazing teacher. Yes, John had said that Jesus would take away the sin of the world and that God himself called him his Son. But Jesus had not, to this point, actually done anything out of the ordinary or unusual. And they needed more.

So Jesus gave them more. He did this sign to give them what they needed, to show them that he was different, that he was out of the ordinary and unusual. And the miracle he did seems very simple and straightforward- he turned water into wine and

saved the wedding celebration- especially in comparison to what he would show them later, like walking on water, causing the blind to see, and raising the dead. But there was actually a lot more to it than that. It had a very specific symbolism that I think we often overlook.

Jesus performs this sign very shortly after he was baptized by John. The gospel writer specifies that it happens on the third day after Jesus was baptized. So the event of Jesus being baptized in the waters of the Jordan would have been very much on the minds of the disciples, who had left their old lives to follow Jesus into the new life that he entered into with his baptism. They would have seen the water that John used to baptize Jesus.

It wouldn't have been any different from the water that the servants used to fill those gigantic stone jars at the wedding, from the water that Jesus turned into wine. That is what makes the miracle a sign, it is what gives them (and us) information that we need about Jesus, it is what points our way to follow Jesus.

Jesus, by turning water into wine, takes something that is plain, yet essential to life, and turns it into something that is extravagant. He takes what is good and makes it better. Because that is what Jesus does with everything, even and especially our lives. He says "I have come that you might have life, and have it abundantly." The disciples saw him turn water into wine, the plain stuff into the good stuff, and they knew that they were going on the ride of their lives, that nothing would ever be the same again.

When we follow him, Jesus turns our water into wine, he takes our plain stuff and turns it into the good stuff. He gives us life, new life, and he gives it abundantly. So there you go.

Honestly, I have struggled all week with where to go next in this morning's sermon. It is very clear to me that the point of the miraculous sign of Jesus turning water into wine was to show his disciples (his followers) that he will take our old and plain lives and turn them into new and abundant lives. But now that has been made clear, it is difficult to know what else to say. Because for me, and for most of us, we have always been followers of Jesus. We have not had an "old life" for Jesus to make new. Unlike the disciples, we didn't have to leave anything behind to follow Jesus into this new life, where he turns our water into wine. It's hard to compare water and wine and see wine as better when wine is what we have been drinking all of our lives.

It's hard to see a miracle when you have been living the miracle your whole life. It's hard to be grateful for what we have always had. And we have always had Jesus. We have always had his love, and his grace, and his forgiveness. We have always had the new life that he brings. And maybe we have forgotten how blessed that we are to have always had the good stuff.

Maybe that is the point, maybe that is where this sign is pointing us today- to remember the miracle of our own lives, of our own faith. To remember that we have had the good stuff all of our lives and to see that we have never run out but we have always had all that we need. And just as Jesus used that first sign of turning water into wine to reveal his glory to the disciples, let us use the miracle of having lived our lives in the love, the grace, and the forgiveness of God to reveal his glory to all the world.

We are Jesus' miraculous signs. And it is time to stop being "quiet miracles" but it is time to live loudly as examples of the "good stuff" that Jesus does. We can point the way to Jesus. We can show and tell the world who Jesus is and what Jesus does. We can reveal his glory for we are his glory.

Amen.