

## **The Wedding in Cana**

John 2:1-11  
Sermon for Sunday January 23, 2022

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Doesn't it feel good to be going to a wedding in today's Gospel?

Today, the gospel calls us to change from sweatpants into our festive attire and walk away from our Zoom screens. We are invited to imagine gathering with people we care about, for a happy occasion. The relationships are close, the conversations are animated, a feast is on the table and the wine is flowing.

Many of us have deferred life celebrations during COVID for our own sake and for the sake of others. This is a good thing because we are looking out for each other. But, think of the weddings that have been postponed or downsized and the family reunions that have been rescheduled. It has been way too long since we've attended the normal things, the joyful things that we used to do, and possibly even took for granted.

We aren't physically going to a wedding today, but we do get to tag along with Jesus and his mother and his friends who were invited to a wedding in Cana of Galilee. We live vicariously through them today as they go to a party. Perhaps as we observe this celebration and the actions and generosity of Jesus at this wedding, we will be inspired and strengthened for the days ahead.

If we were to consult with a first century wedding planner, we would learn that these first century weddings could be extravagant affairs. Not only were family members, and lots of extended family members, gathered; but the whole community would be included in the festivities. After the wedding ceremony itself, these weddings could involve a week of feasting. These weddings often came at the end of the harvest, after the wine crush, when the weather was perfect for such a celebration. There was no reason for the bride and the groom to leave, like we might, for a honeymoon. There was too much going on at the wedding feast.

At our wedding feast in Cana, the mother of Jesus notices that the wine had run out. In the first century culture, the host and his family would endure insufferable shame if this happened. It would be a blot on the family and hard to live down. Jesus' mother knows this, and she looks to Jesus for help. Jesus responds that it is not their concern - his hour has not come. Undeterred by Jesus' protest, my hunch is Mary gives Jesus her very best "LOOK" and tells the servants to do what Jesus tells them to do.

Even Jesus cannot deflect his mother's "LOOK" and so he obliges. Jesus sees six massive stone water jars nearby that could hold up to thirty gallons each. He instructs the servants to fill the jugs with water and then tells them to draw from those jugs and take what they have drawn to the chief steward. They do. The chief steward tastes the wine and is flabbergasted because it is so good. The steward pulls the bridegroom aside and tells him, "This is the finest wine you have served. This is what you serve when the guests first arrive - not what you serve after they have been drinking for a while."

The steward doesn't know where the new wine came from, but the servants know. We are told that in this first sign in Cana of Galilee, that Jesus revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. The party is saved and the host escapes humiliation before his guests, a handful of people witnessed this act of Jesus, and his disciples now believe in him because of this miraculous act. That's a pretty good outcome for the day.

Yet, I think John's Gospel invites us to go deeper, beyond face value.

The other Gospel accounts give us "the miracles" of Jesus. John, in his gospel gives us miraculous acts but calls them "signs". The signs point to something beyond the miracle at hand. They generally tell us something about the character and nature of Jesus.

The sign here points us to a ridiculously generous Jesus. He could have filled half the jugs with wine and that would have been just enough to deal with the thirsty party goers but know he makes more wine than they will ever need, there is an abundance of wine. And He could have made nice wine, the okay wine that most party goers would have expected at this time in the party, but no Jesus makes the very best wine. The primary revelation in this first sign of -Jesus at the wedding -is to point us to see what abundant grace looks like and tastes like.

What resonates for me is that the story of God's generosity is not played out in the temple or in any public arena. Temple authorities and government officials aren't hovering around like we see in so much of Jesus' ministry. Instead, Jesus' generosity happens at a most regular, most human event - a wedding. We get a glimpse of how God's generosity through Jesus occurs in the midst of ordinary life, ordinary rituals, ordinary relationships. It happens right where we live.

We see in this text that God wants good things for God's creation and wants us to live joyful, and good lives. This does not deny that there is real scarcity in the world. But, by knowing God's intention to be generous, perhaps we see more clearly how it has been human decisions that have messed with this intention.

Where else do we see the generosity of Jesus in this wedding feast?

We aren't privy to knowing who the bride and the groom are either, or the status of their family in the community. Maybe that's another point John is making here. It doesn't matter who we are because we **all** can experience the abundance that Jesus offers. His abundant grace is not restricted to a few.

One might see even in the exchange that Jesus has with his mother that maybe it wasn't the "LOOK" that got to him to act but rather he was being generous to his mother by turning the water into wine. After all, Jesus clearly did not think it was time to begin his ministry. But his mother knew it was time and, maybe Jesus did it for her.

Another characteristic of Jesus' generosity. We might assume everyone present knew that Jesus was responsible for the new wine. However, we are not sure who knew what Jesus had done beyond the servants, his disciples, and his mother. Jesus didn't grab the mic, announce the arrival of great wine and toast the newlyweds.

Sometimes, Jesus' generosity is under the radar and often we do not see it unless we are looking for it. Nonetheless, abundance was present whether people understood its source or not.

Here is another thing. Jesus did not order wine from the vineyard next door to fill the need. Instead, he used the materials before him to share his abundance. Might this signal to us that Jesus can use what we already have to create abundance. Maybe this also tells us that we don't have to go far afield to experience the abundance that Jesus offers.

What else do you see in this act of Jesus at the wedding? We probably should ask why this is the first of Jesus' seven signs in John's Gospel. After all, isn't healing the sick more important than delivering cases of wine to a wedding?

Perhaps we are given this sign first because it shows us the nature of God, and how God colors everything we do. If we perceive God as vengeful, heaven help us - won't we be a judgmental and miserable lot? If we have a stingy God, everything will be for me and mine. Instead, at Cana, Jesus shows us grace upon grace and that we have a generous God. We can live our lives with the knowledge of God's abundance embedded in our souls. Perhaps we get this sign first because it informs how we view everything else going forward.

Today's Gospel also puts us on a scavenger hunt of sorts, to look more carefully for God's abundance - this generosity of Jesus - in everyday places and circumstances.

To be honest it feels like we have already begun the hunt. If you think about the past couple of years, which we all know have been difficult; have we written the time off because we couldn't do the things we wanted to do when we wanted to do them? No, at our best have we have not been looking to see how God's generosity has permeated even this time.

I think we need to continue our scavenger hunt this day - remaining open to look for the generosity of Jesus around us in the ordinary, the everyday rituals, and the beautiful relationships we often take for granted. And when we emerge from this pandemic era and we get to be at those long-awaited weddings, those parties, those life events we've all been waiting for, I am convinced we will notice even more quickly God's generous grace and our hearts will open in profound gratitude.

The generosity of Jesus at the wedding of Cana shows us that God's generosity and abundance happens right where we are, right where we live. Right here and right now. Let's not miss it!

## John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup>Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup>When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." <sup>4</sup>And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." <sup>5</sup>His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." <sup>6</sup>Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup>He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. <sup>9</sup>When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup>and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." <sup>11</sup>Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

***May God bless to our understanding and our living these words from Holy Scripture.***

### **Benediction:**

Just as Jesus' presence at the wedding banquet changed water into wine, so too does his presence in our lives change everything.

We go immersed in God's abundance,

God's generosity,

God's presence in our ordinary and our extraordinary.

Let us go into our world to love and serve others from this sure foundation.

Let us live boldly in the way of Jesus.

Amen.

Rev. Debra Berg