

From Water to Wine. John 2:1 11

John 10 10

The Chicago suburb of Oak Lawn had a problem - motorists weren't coming to a complete stop at stop signs. So in 2007 the Mayor came up with a creative solution. He added a second, smaller octagonal sign the town's 50 or so stop signs that read:

STOP - And smell the roses

STOP - No really, you gotta stop

STOP - Or I'm Telling Your Mom

STOP - In the naaaame of love

And – it worked!!! People stopped at the stop signs. The additional signs were so imaginative and humorous people laughed and stopped. Everybody laughed... except the Illinois Department of Transportation which deemed the signs violations of the Federal Uniform Traffic Control Act and threatened to withhold funds if the signs weren't removed. Sadly, the Mayor had to comply.

The Mayor believed that if he could just get the motorists to pay attention, then they could get the message. The message was STOP! It was an important message... he was using special signs to get it across.

Signs have always been used to get messages across to people. Whether square, rectangular, triangular, or octagonal... there is a message tied to the sign. Sometimes the sign's message is very important and even critical, at other times they are just to give us a bit more information. In our text this morning we're told that this (changing water into wine) *"was the first of His **SIGNS**, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, which revealed His glory; and His disciples believed in him."* John 2:11

The four Gospels record at least 35 different miracles that Jesus had performed during His ministry. The apostle John closed his Gospel account saying, *"there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."* (John 21:25) In other words, Jesus probably did a lot more MIRACLES during His ministry than any of the Gospel writers could record, but for his gospel, John specifically chose 7 or 8 of Jesus' miracles, which he called "**SIGNS**" indicating that these events were intended to teach us something. They were like SIGNPOSTS saying, PAY ATTENTION! This is the Son of God and He is bringing something new for your life.

So what can we learn about God, from this event of turning water into wine? If you pay attention to the sign, you might learn something joyously new and refreshing about the life Jesus came to offer you.

According to this gospel account, only three days after John the Baptizer identified Him as *THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD*, Jesus was walking back home to attend a wedding party. By this time at least five men were now walking

with Him, considering whether or not to become His disciples. Most these men were, in one way or another connected to John the Baptizer. At least two of these men had earlier been disciples of John and the other three were their friends and relatives.

As you know, John the Baptizer led a very austere life. Dressed in a camel's hair garment he lived out in the wilderness, down by the Jordan River, while preaching repentance for the forgiveness of sin. The life that John chose to live was neither luxurious or frivolous; it was intentionally serious and somber. He lived by eating locusts and wild honey, so we can assume that his followers did the same. Imagine then what these men might have thought when they discovered that on their third day with Jesus, they were headed to a wedding?

I can picture two different reactions from these new disciples. Some may have thought to themselves, *"Heaven forbid! Jesus is taking us to a party when there are a lot better things we could be doing with our time. John must have been suffering a sunstroke to think that this Jesus was greater than Him. This isn't the kind of thing John would have us doing."*

I can also picture the others thinking to themselves, *"Now this is my kind of teacher. Look at all that food and at last some wine. We've paid our dues with John, now it's time to celebrate!"*

Can't you also see those disciples who may have frowned upon this venture, sitting erect in their seats, carefully watching Jesus, sizing Him up, to see if His actions would meet their approval. They may also have occasionally issued dagger-like stares at the others, to let them know that they shouldn't enjoy themselves so much.

On the other hand, the ones who were enjoying the party were also watching Jesus, looking for hints of approval, testing the limits of acceptability. They may have even cast an occasional smirk in response to the glares of their friends, who were disturbed by such festivities.

What a tense situation this must have been for Jesus and His fledgling disciples. So, when Jesus quietly stood and walked into the kitchen, where the jars of purification would have been kept, His disciples watched intently. Perhaps a sense of hope welled up within those who sat erect in their chairs, that Jesus was going to suggest serving a little less food, so that some could be given to the poor. The other disciples may have held their breath, hoping that Jesus wouldn't do something stupid, like volunteering them to do the dishes, since they had enjoyed themselves so much.

The disciples didn't have to wait long to discover the purpose of Jesus' trip to the kitchen. The servants soon emerged with more pitchers of wine, which, when tasted by the steward of the feast, was proclaimed to be of excellent quality; the best yet!

And when the disciples later realized that it was Jesus who had miraculously turned water into wine, so that the feast might continue without embarrassment to the host, we might have expected them to react according to form. Those who viewed the party as a frivolous act may have been quietly critical, "*Egad! Jesus turned water into wine. He should have turned the wine into water and drank punch.*" Those who were enjoying the celebration, after breathing a sigh of relief that they didn't have to do the dishes, might have thought "*All right! 120 gallons of wine. Let's get back to the celebration!*"

They could have reacted in this way – but they didn't.

After setting up this story, the Apostle John shocks us with the news that through His first **sign, Jesus had revealed His glory**, and his disciples, who to this point may have been struggling with their allegiance between John the Baptist and Jesus, **believed in Jesus.**

But, perhaps the real significance of this first sign was not just the fact that Jesus revealed His true nature to them and that His disciples now believed in Him, but that, in the act of turning water into wine, Jesus, the Messiah, was signaling that He was as promised bringing new light, new life, and a new relationship with God for us all. So, let's take a deeper look at the many symbolic details John has included in this story to better help us get the message Jesus was sending to us.

Cana was close to Jesus' hometown of Nazareth and Jesus' mother Mary was somehow involved in helping to serve the feast, which implies that the bridegroom or bride were probably relatives of Jesus. That is why He was invited "*and of course your new friends are also welcome.*"

Weddings were the biggest event in a Jewish community, the feasting would last for a week or more, everyone was invited, and the host family having prepared long in advance, was expected to provide all the food and drink; it was an amazing and joyous celebration for the entire community. So it is not surprising that **the Jewish idea of Heaven was that it would be a like wedding feast.**

Jesus used this imagery for Heaven in His parables – *the kingdom of Heaven is like a king who wanted to throw a wedding feast for his son* (Matthew 22, see also Luke 14), The Apostle John also included this imagery in his book of Revelation: *Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb* (Rev. 19).

Even more surprising, did you ever notice that Jesus often referred to Himself as a "*the bridegroom,*" even John the Baptizer had called Him this (Matthew 9:14-16, John 3:29-30)

So if you are now wondering – since we never thought Jesus got married – who the bride of Christ might be ... it is us and all who have come to Him in faith, becoming the church, now married to Jesus, who – like every Jewish bridegroom – first came to our house so that He might bring us home to His Father's house.

So He had been invited to this wedding, but probably the main reason why Jesus came only three days after gathering His disciples, was because He liked weddings since they reminded Him of His Heavenly home. Even though He had not been intending to do anything spectacular here, to be with Jesus is meant to be at a continuous celebration; which was one of the criticisms that His enemies lodged against Him: Jesus attended too many parties. Matthew 11:19

But this particular celebration was about to end sadly. The guests did not yet know it, but ***the wine had run out***, which would be a major embarrassment for the host family; a shame that might forever taint this young couple's marriage. So in John's Gospel this wedding feast becomes symbolic of the current relation that Israel now had with the Lord their God. As a nation married to God, their spiritual wine had run out; they were still going through the motions, but there was no more celebration.

There is also a personal application for me and you in this part of the story. Remember what a celebration it was when you first came in faith to Christ? But has the party ended? Have you for a long time just gone through the motions, not realizing that your wine has run out? Then it's time to get back to walking close to the Bridegroom so that He can refill you with some of His new wine. Just as He did for this one wedding, Jesus came to provide new wine for our souls as well. Jesus wants us to be filled with His Spirit, but that can only happen as we daily walk with Him. Ephesians 5:18

Here is another personal application: Have you ever thought that God up in Heaven, only deals with the big issues – like saving the world and your soul – but doesn't have time to help out with the mundane, everyday, problems in your life. Well, here you see Jesus quietly making wine – without most of the guests even noticing – so that this one wedding might continue, and the couple can avoid the embarrassment. Yes when you invite Jesus into your home, He gladly helps keep the celebration going there as well.

Another interesting thing to note is that Jesus performed this sign for only a select few people to see: only Mary and His disciples knew about it as did some servants who weren't going to tell anyone because they would have gotten in big trouble. Now most miracle workers usually want an audience to draw attention to their abilities. If it were you or me, we might have gathered the entire wedding party around those jars to witness their miraculous transformation. Of course while gaining us fame, this would still have shamed the wedding couple for running out of wine. And as He already knew, which would happen all too often, when Jesus later performed a miracle in front of a crowd, that it was usually misunderstood by most of them and seldom brought about

genuine faith. So Jesus quietly provided what was needed to keep the wedding feast going, while signaling to His new disciples of better things to come.

But now, we need to deal with what appears to be the dark moment in this story. When Jesus' mother, learns that the wine has run out, rather than going to the host couple, she brings the problem to her son, who replies in a way that – in our manner of speaking – seems to be rather rude. ***Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.'*** So, first you need to learn that in His day, greeting someone as "woman" was not rude, but was the polite way to address another lady; in the same way that today one would say "Madam," or as we say it here in the south: "Ma'am."

But that He did not use a more intimate term in addressing His mother, did indicate that Jesus was now making some separation between family and ministry needs. She was putting pressure on Him – as His mother – to do something about another's private problem. Our Bible never records that in His first thirty years of life, Jesus had ever done something miraculous like this before; John records this as His very first sign; those at the wedding who knew Jesus, still only thought of Him as "*the carpenter's son*." So why did Mary think He could do something now? Here we see Mary acting on her personal knowledge of who Jesus really was, as God's Son certainly He could do something. The fact that after their conversation, she told the servants to "*do whatever He tells you*," indicates that she knew He would.

This is not only good advice, it is also our fourth application: **do whatever Jesus tells you! If you don't you might miss out on a miracle.** What would have happened had those servants refused to take what they had earlier known to only be water and serve it as wine?

But, let's continue on with His remarks to His mother, *what concern is that to you and to Me? My hour has not yet come.* What Jesus was saying to His mother was, "*why are you putting this parental burden on me, this is their wedding not my coming out party.*" Even now, Jesus knew, as Mary had guessed from Simeon's "sword" prophecy at His birth, that His ministry would end with His death; As also did John the Baptizer when he called Jesus, the "*Lamb of God.*" Jesus knew that these next few years needed to be carefully choreographed so that He might have His disciples trained by that fateful Passover day when He would have to die. But Mary was His mother and she had asked, so Jesus honored her by obeying.

Cubs, while we are on this point, I strongly advise you not to use this response at home with your own mother.

'Son, take out the trash!'

'Woman, what does that have to do with me? My hour has not come!'

If you do try this, you may discover that your hour has come sooner than you anticipated!

Lastly we need to notice why Jesus purposely chose those six stone jars filled with 120 gallons of not necessarily clean water used only for ceremonial hand washing. Certainly there were plenty of other pots available, there were also all those now empty wine skins that could have easily been refilled with new wine. But remember the symbolism involved in this sign. The legalistic, ritualistic Jewish way of doing religion had now also "run out of wine;" there was no more joy in the journey. Those water pots symbolized the need to continuously keep re-cleansing oneself in order to be right with God. They were just another reminder of their ritual uncleanness. That is why Jesus intentionally chose these water jars in which to create new wine. The water was only for ongoing cleansing; wine was for celebrating.

Jesus took jars that were a daily reminder of our human shortcomings and made them into a source of joy. That these jars were no longer used for cleansing, but now for celebrating, should also remind to us that the cleansing that Jesus offers us is not a temporary fix, needing to be redone again tomorrow. Jesus is offering us forgiveness that is lasting. Jesus is offering a relationship with God that is a lasting and joyous celebration.

So, the ultimate point of this story, the purpose of the sign that Jesus performed at the Cana wedding, was not only to reveal His true self to His disciples, but also His ability to transform life! Our life as well!

Jesus transformed more than water that day, He also transformed His disciples' lives: *"and His disciples believed in Him."*

If Christ Jesus can change water into wine and men into believers; then, He can change us. He can change despair into hope, bitterness into peace, hatred into love, sorrow into joy, sin into grace and death into life; which is exactly the message that the Apostle John intended with the writing of His gospel account.

The last sign that Jesus gave His disciples was to urge them to *believe in God and also believe in me*. Then with His promise to return and gather them to Himself in His Father's house, Jesus went off to die, and rise again to new life three days later.

<p>But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in His name. John 20:30-31</p>

John brought his Gospel account to a close with these words...

*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book. **But these are written so that you may come to***

believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in His name. John 20:30-31

Christ still has the power to change lives today. He is still here to free you from dead rituals and fill you with His new wine of celebration; if you will just pay attention to the signs and join with His disciples in daily walking with Him.