

**New Wine, New Life**

January 20, 2019

**John 2: 1-11**

*<sup>1</sup> 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.*



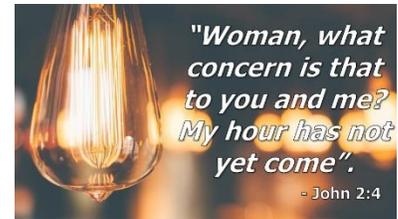
Today we have the unofficial start to Jesus' ministry. He has called some disciples to follow and they are at a wedding party in nearby Cana. Jesus has not done anything "big" yet. In today's passage, prompted by His mother, Jesus turns something ordinary into something extraordinary. This was something Jesus would do often. This is something that God continues to do in our lives, with ordinary people like us, making us or our actions extraordinary. Let us pray...

The area that our story takes place is the area where Jesus grew up – in Galilee. It was a relatively fertile area that allowed most people there to be fairly self-sufficient. They faced the same challenges that all people in Israel faced. The Romans taxed them heavily, the travel was difficult due to the rough terrain, and hardly anyone had any discretionary income. There are people in our community who feel this way. They are struggling to pay bills, they have no mode of transportation other than the things on the ends of their legs, and they scrape and pinch to get by, living paycheck to paycheck. There are people in our community who could relate to the way that most people lived in Jesus' day.

Jesus and those who lived in Galilee lived a very basic life. They had the necessities but not much more. Much like us today, events like the one that Mary and Jesus and the disciples were at were very special occasions. One of the hallmark events in a family's life would be when a son or daughter got married. It was an event that the family would plan for, that they would save up things for long before the actual event. They would take on an extra job to have a little more for the celebration. They would scrimp a little here and there to make the wedding just a bit nicer. Unlike today, in Jesus' time, a wedding festival would often go on for days if not for a week. They were big deals.

Well, before the wedding festival ends, they run out of something that was key to the celebration. In verse 3 we read, "*The wine gave out*". It was insulting to all who were there to run out of wine. The family had simply not planned well because clearly not enough wine had been gathered for this hallmark event. Word of the mistake would probably move fast. Mary hears about it and she goes to Jesus, saying, "*They have no wine*".

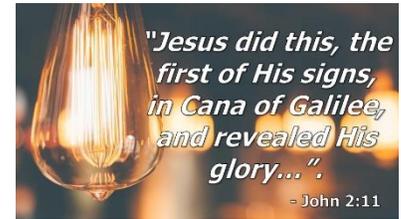
An interesting exchange unfolds. He replies to her, *"Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come"*. It is not their own family, so why would it be their concern or even their place to right this situation? The choice of the word "woman" is also interesting. Today we are maybe taken aback by the use of this word. Imagine addressing your wife or your mother that way. I can imagine how Kristin would react if she said something to me and I responded, *"Woman..."*. Yes, I would be in trouble. Rightly so. But there is a deeper reality here. Mary's relationship with Jesus changes when His public ministry begins. No longer is she Jesus' mother. Mary is now like us - she must come to Jesus like us – as a sinner in need of grace.



That Mary would imply that Jesus should do something here is also odd. Jesus has not begun to teach or perform any miracles, so why start at a wedding festival? It seems like a peculiar way to begin one's ministry. Yet after what I am sure was one of those "mother knows best" looks, Mary says to the servants, *"Do whatever He tells you"*. We need to understand that this is a great demonstration of faith by Mary. Mary shows a willingness to turn it over to Jesus, confident that whatever He said or did would be best.

We know the rest of the story – the jars used for purification are filled with ordinary, common water and it is miraculously changed into the uncommon – extraordinarily good wine. The jars were used in the purification rituals that all Jews would practice. They were a part of the old covenant Law. They are symbolic in the way that Jesus will give us something better, something far greater than the Law. It is a hint at the new covenant that will soon come.

After the miracle has occurred, the wine steward calls the bridegroom over and notes that they have *"kept the good wine until now"*. Changing the water to wine reveals the power of Jesus. In verse 11 we read, *"Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory"*. Jesus does not touch the water or the jars. No words are spoken. No hand motions. The water changes to wine. Through the miracle, Jesus reveals God's glory and His provision for us, making in turning water into wine. This is the first of His signs.



A sign is significant. Signs point beyond themselves. This is not purely a display of power – think walls of Jericho falling down for that. This is not some conjuring trick – think of when Moses' staff turned to a snake for that. A sign points to something more – to the deeper realities that can be seen only by eyes of faith. The glory reveals Jesus' divine power on display. Because of this, the disciples believe in Him as the Son of God, as the Messiah.



Wine is a symbol of joy, lighting up a room with laughter and friendship. The lull that would have settled over such an important event would have been dispelled as the celebration continued. When I think of God's kingdom that some day will come, I think it will be filled with singing and dancing and feasting. My vision of heaven is a place of joy and laughter that is ruled by Christ. In this kingdom, God will turn the water of sadness and anxiety and stress and emptiness into the wine of new life. It will be a joyous and glorious new life.

But I also do not believe that one has to wait for eternal life to experience new life. I think that when we make the choice to allow Jesus to be Lord of our lives in the here and now, then we experience being born again in this life. We are made into new creations in this present world. The old self dies, and we are made new in Christ. While this is wonderful for us, it cannot stop there. We must seek the same for others. We must be willing to share what made us new. It is not enough to have our water turned to wine. As followers of Jesus Christ we must seek to help others to find new life. It is the Great Commission, it is what is written on the cover of our bulletin, it is what is written right there on the back wall of the church. We help others find new life by engaging the other in positive ways, by helping them to improve their station in life, by helping them to find joy in Christ. The Great Commission, our denomination's mission statement, and our church's mission statement all charge each of us with direct responsibility for the least, the lost, the and the last in our communities, calling us to help each know and grow in Christ.

Friends, we have a wonderful gift to share. Jesus is the light of the world. He is hope in the darkness. He is comfort in the sorrow. He is strength in the trial. He is assurance in the doubt. He is so much to each of us. He blesses us all in so many ways. We are blessed not to keep it for ourselves, to hoard it. We are blessed to bless others. Yet we can find it hard to give blessings away, to share what God has blessed us with. We can have a scarcity mentality that tells us that if we give something away, we might not have enough for later, that we might be the ones wanting one day. Some of us also struggle with being content. We chase the next thing, the newest thing, the thing everyone else

has. If having \$100,000 in the bank is good, then having \$200,000 is even better. To illustrate what this struggle can look like, a cute little story:

*The American businessman was at the pier of a little coastal Mexican village when a small boat with just one fisherman docked. Inside the small boat were several large yellow fin tuna. The American complimented the man on the quality of his fish and asked how long it took him to catch them. The man replied, "Only a little while." The American then asked why he didn't stay out and catch more fish? The man said he had enough to support his family's immediate needs. The American then asked, but what do you do with the rest of your time? The fisherman said, "I sleep late, fish a little, play with my children, take a siesta with my wife, Maria, stroll into the village each evening where I sip wine and play guitar with my amigos. I have a full and busy life, senior."*

*The American scoffed, "I have a Harvard MBA and I could help you." You should spend more time fishing and with the proceeds buy a bigger boat. With the proceeds from the bigger boat you could buy several boats. Eventually you would have a fleet of fishing boats. Instead of selling your catch to a middleman you could sell directly to the processor, eventually opening your own cannery. You would control the product, processing, and distribution. You would need to leave this small coastal fishing village and move to Mexico City, then Los Angeles and eventually New York City where you will run your expanding enterprise."*

*The fisherman asked, "But senior, how long will all this take?" To which the American replied, "15 to 20 years."*

*"But then what, senior?"*

*The American laughed and said, "That's the best part. When the time is right you would announce an IPO and sell your company stock to the public and become very rich. You would make millions."*

*"Millions, senior? Then what?"*

*The American said, "Then you would retire. Move to a small coastal fishing village where you would sleep late, fish a little, play with your kids, take a siesta with your wife, stroll into the village in the evenings where you could sip wine and play your guitar with your amigos."*

This illustration paints a picture of stark contrast. Are we like the American or are we more like the "poor" fisherman? Who is really "rich" in life? How do we define "rich"? Many people today are driven to accumulate more or bigger or better. Many people struggle with their sense of identity and self-worth. It is a story that plays out over and over. But we do not live without hope.

Like the fisherman, we can find contentment in life. Like the fisherman, we are often blessed right where we are. Life is good. God loves and cares for us. We are blessed. When we come to this place in our hearts, to this place of contentment in our lives and with the world, then we understand what we have differently. We come to realize that we are blessed so that we can bless others. And how we do this, how we bless others - it matters.

Author Madeline L'Engle understands this. She believes that our job as a Christian, at this most basic level, is to share – no, to share lavishly what we have been given. She writes,

*"The point is to be ready at all times to give and serve what God has given us, to manifest God's glory by reaching out with the ordinary..."*

*"... to manifest God in your own blessings through everyday opportunities. It may be that turning water into wine will be your given task, but I doubt it..."*

*"... On the other hand, it could mean turning your jar of peanut butter into sandwiches for the homeless..."*

*"... or turning your voice into corporate praise on Sunday morning."*

- Madeline L'Engle

*"The point is to be ready at all times to give and serve what God has given to us, to manifest God's glory by reaching out with the ordinary... to manifest God in your own givenness through everyday opportunities. It may be that turning six jars of water into wine will be your given task, but I doubt it. On the other hand, it could mean turning your jar of peanut butter into sandwiches for the homeless or turning your voice into corporate praise on Sunday morning".*

It does not matter if we are sharing peanut butter or filet minion. It does not matter if we are the best singer in the church or the worst. Through Christ, like those at the wedding banquet who received the new wine, through Christ we have received new life. What matters is what we do with that. With the saving power of Jesus Christ, we are willing servants, giving away what we have?



The power to turn water to wine was amazing, but the power to turn a sinner from their sins is even more remarkable. In our passage, we see the disciples beginning to be transformed. They will continue to be transformed, changing from lowly fishermen and tax collectors to bold witnesses to the saving power of Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This is the transformation we experience too – we are all sinners that have been redeemed by grace. This is our greatest blessing. It is a blessing that we must share with others, lighting up the darkness of their lives with the light and love of Jesus. We are called to light up the dark places of our world, playing our role as servants of the King, helping to bring new life to all. May it be so for you and for me. Amen.

### **GPS – Grow, Pray, Serve**

- 1) As the king of your own domain, what do you have that you could share with others, bringing new life or improved welfare or increased joy?
- 2) How do you envision the new kingdom? Pray to experience more of that vision here on earth for yourself and those you know!
- 3) How can we light up the dark places of our world, playing our part as servants of the king?