

## John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” 4 And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” 5 His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” 6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. 9 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 10 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.” 11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

## A STRANGE MIRACLE

This morning we read about the first miracle in the gospel of John. Jesus turns water into wine, and the party

continues. What an appropriate miracle to read about as we approach the high holy day of Super Bowl Sunday!

According to our Scripture lesson this little miracle bolstered the faith of those first disciples, but I must admit that at first blush it doesn't do the same for me. I'm one of those who finds this miracle baffling.

Why does John make this the very first miracle in his gospel? And why does this miracle produce faith in the ones who saw it?

Actually, very few people witness this miracle. The only people who really know that the water is turned into wine are the two servants who filled the six thirty gallon jugs with water. Everyone else could (and possibly did) offer a less miraculous account of what happened.

Mary could have said that Jesus had just bought the happy couple an extravagant wedding gift. The steward had his own explanation,

“Wow, this is unusual. They forgot to bring out the best wine at the beginning of the festivities. I've never seen this happen before.”

To say the least John is very modest in his description of this first miracle.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Don't misunderstand. Jesus certainly could and did turn water into wine. The question is why did he do it? What is it about this miracle that causes the disciples to believe in Jesus?

Miracles, even powerful miracles don't always create faith. A preacher said that in his ministry he had known only one woman who had experienced what he thought was a true miracle. This woman's hand had been badly burned, and miraculously it healed overnight.

Her doctors didn't have an explanation. They said it was a miracle.

But, the interesting thing about this woman is that she didn't believe in miracles. So she explained what happened to her as a "quirk of nature, a psychosomatic healing"

The pastor wrote, "She didn't believe in miracles before she was healed, and she doesn't believe now. For her, the healing was not a sign of anything other than the natural processes of the body at work. For her at least seeing was not believing."

The big question when it comes to miracles is: “What does it mean?” The miracles of the Bible are not about certain individuals having an inside track to healing or help. If that’s true miracles are unfair. Why should one person be healed and another be left to suffer?

## SIGNS OF THE KINGDOM

The miracles of the Bible are a sign of the impending Kingdom of God. The emphasis is not so much on the miracle itself but upon what the miracle tells us about God as revealed in Jesus.

Indeed, that’s what our lesson for today says. Changing water into wine was not a miracle meant to impress people. It was a sign, the first of many signs that revealed God’s glory. (John 2:11)

A sign is something that gives us important information about the future.

To give a mundane example, when you see a stop sign you know that there is an intersection in your future, and that other people have the right of way. If you don’t pay attention to that sign you may well end up as an accident on the six o’clock news!

It's important that we pay attention to signs. In a world without signs we would become hopelessly lost.

One of my friends who is also a minister gave a good example of the importance of signs. It was about something that happened in the 1940s during the Battle of Britain.

With the horror of daily bombings and the agony of Dunkirk fresh on their minds, the people went through the countryside removing signs. They removed every sign indicating towns, streams and directions. Nothing remained that would assist the enemy.

Unfortunately, the people who lived in that area found out that they also needed those signs. A typical auto trip over familiar roads and territory often ended in frustration as people became lost. The signs that had stood almost unnoticed for years were suddenly crucial.

In the same way the miraculous signs of the Bible are important because they guide us in our understanding of who God is and what God is doing in our lives.

What kind of God heals the sick, feeds the hungry and (in the case of our lesson for today) makes sure that the wedding party is not marred by a lack of wine?

## A SIGN OF ABUNDANT GRACE

It's significant that this is a sign that John places at the very beginning of his gospel. It's as if John is telling us, "If you want to know about Jesus the first thing you need to know is this. He is the one who turns water into wine. He is the one who brings joy to life."

It's like what we will read later in John's gospel. Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. (John 10:10) There is an extravagance to God's grace that is revealed in this passage. Jesus not only created enough wine to keep the party going; Jesus gave them more than they needed.

The six stone jars referred to in our passage for today contained water used for ceremonial purification. It wasn't just about getting clean. It was about going through a religious cleansing ritual. And they needed a lot of water for that.

Notice what Jesus does. He has the servants fill the six jars to the brim. That's 180 gallons of water according to some commentators. And then he changes this water used for a religious ceremony into wine. That's 180 gallons of wine!

What does this mean? The early church took it as a sign of extravagant grace, 180 gallons of pure grace! God not only washes away the sin that we cannot wash away with even the most elaborate rituals; God also brings us an abundant and cheerful life. When Jesus is in the house, the party continues.

## A SIGN OF THE KINGDOM THAT COMES

In early Christian art the scene of the miracle at Cana often formed a counterpart to that of the multiplication of the loaves ... thus forming an allusion to the bread and wine of the Lord's supper. John's first readers would have made the connection.

This wedding was not just any wedding, and this wine was not just any wine. It was a sign of the kingdom that comes in Jesus. It was a sign, a foretaste of wedding feast of the Lamb, that grand and glorious day when God will invite people from all over the world to dine at his holy table.

It was a sign of that grand and glorious day of salvation and forgiveness that was coming. It was a sign of that grand and glorious day when after the "third day" Jesus would be raised, and the world would change forever.

Did you notice the familiar language in our passage for today? John is anticipating the end of the story at the beginning. That's why this story occurs on the "third day" and alludes to the fact that Jesus' "time" that has not yet come. (John 2:1,4)

Our lesson for today anticipates the coming of God's kingdom in Jesus. Unfortunately we are often turn a blind eye to the signs of the Kingdom.

## TURNING WINE INTO WATER

The great philosopher and theologian of the 19th century, Søren Kierkegaard wrote, "Christ turned water into wine, but the church has succeeded in doing something even more difficult: it has turned wine into water."

He makes a good point. We have often watered down the joy of the gospel. We operate from a mindset of scarcity instead of abundance. We fail to take advantage of the abundant life that is promised us in Christ Jesus.

I like to work with churches that are in transition. I think that when a church is in transition there is a great opportunity for growth in ministry and mission.

But, there is one obstacle that first must be overcome. The church must get over the idea that they are don't have

enough resources to get the job done. This is especially true in smaller churches.

Jim Cushman wrote a book on the small church many years ago entitled “Beyond Survival,” and the title is a good summary of what he had to say. Cushman said that the big problem in the small church is that it becomes too survival oriented.

It focuses on what it doesn’t have and what it can’t do. It worries about the future and whether it will be able to keep its doors open.

And when these fears become too great they become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Ministry cannot occur in any church (large or small) that has become too survival oriented.

Like Mary we are afraid that we might run out. We are afraid that we might not have enough. We say to Jesus, “We have no wine.”

But, unlike Mary we are sometimes unwilling to trust Jesus to supply our need. We are unwilling to just do what he says. Instead our life is dominated by a fear of not having enough.

What happens if we run out? Suppose we don't have enough money? Suppose we don't have enough time?

This way of thinking waters down the wine of joy and hope. This way of thinking prevents us from living the abundant life that God wants for us. We often live our lives in fear of what might happen when the wine runs out.

And yet we live in the presence of the One who can turn water into wine. We live in the presence of the One who can bring joy to a land filled with despair.

## LACK OF WINE AN OPPORTUNITY

I think that when we run out of wine it is an opportunity to go in a new, better direction. This is a lesson that the Bible teaches quite clearly. The spiritual journey never allows us to get too settled in one place.

Abraham was always on a journey to a place that God would show him, and ironically all along the way he resided in the Promised Land.

Jacob struggled to find the face of God, the eternal blessing, but it was only when Jacob thought that all was lost that God "wrestled him to the ground and changed him forever."

Joseph had dreams of being someone great and powerful. But it was only after losing everything as a slave in Egypt that he was prepared to receive a vision of grace and forgiveness toward his family.

Moses also lost everything. He was banished to the wilderness and was content to spend the rest of his days herding sheep and goats. But, God had other plans for Moses and his people. He led them out of slavery and into the wilderness where they wandered for forty years.

And it was in the wilderness that they learned to trust God's provision. When they had to move every day and count upon God instead of their own abilities. It was in the wilderness where they became who God had called them to be ... a special people, a holy people.

Do you see the common thread in these stories?

The holy vision comes when the wine runs out. People will not change when they can do the same old thing day after day.

But, when they are forced to move, something new and miraculous is possible. When the wine runs out we are forced to look to Jesus for help.

## THE MIRACLE OF PRESENCE

As Jesus graced a wedding at Cana with his presence, so Jesus graces our lives with his presence as well. The miracle of Cana is not the fact that Jesus turned water into wine. The miracle of Cana is the fact that God in Christ is with us in good times and in bad.

You see, the real human thirst, like our deepest hunger, is for the life God offers us, the close living relationship with the one who loves us.

And this relationship is especially important when the wine runs out in our life. When the joy of life dries up and we have nowhere to turn, when life seems to have lost its zest and direction, it is then that this miracle, this sign is the most important one of all.

God in Christ can restore the joy of our salvation. (Psalm 51:12) God in Christ can provide the sign that helps us make sense out of life.

And when we turn the wine of hope into water, Jesus can turn it back to wine again. He gives us new wine, the best wine that we have ever tasted.

And when we taste the new wine of eternal life we too can become signs of the kingdom. We too can become

signs that point to God's abundance by being generous in the way we live.

## THE WINE RUNS OUT IN HAITI

Did you notice in the coverage of the disaster in Haiti how many of the relief agencies are Christian? Many Christians have gone to Haiti to live with those who need help.

I think I know why. When people live an abundant life they are willing to go to a place where scarcity reigns. When people live an abundant life they feel that they have enough to share.

And if they do happen to run out they trust Jesus to give them what they need. They know from personal experience that Jesus supplies our needs with abundance.

The earthquake in Haiti is a terrible tragedy. Wine (and everything else) has been in short supply in Haiti for many years. Now, with this earthquake the wine has run out.

But, I think that we have an opportunity to demonstrate the love of God in this tragic situation. We can give generously believing that God can multiply our gift in this time of overwhelming need. Now is not the time to cast

blame or suggest that the needs of the desperate are not our responsibility. Now is the time to demonstrate our faith in the power of God. Now is the time for us to demonstrate our belief that the water can be turned into wine and the hungry can be fed.

Polls show that the past ten years have been experienced by many as the worst decade in their lifetime. Certainly the past few years have been especially difficult for many as they have experienced the loss of job and home. I know that many of you have struggled.

But, the way out of the wilderness is not to circle the wagons and hold on to what we've got. Instead, we take what we have and bring it to Jesus. There is a hidden abundance in Him that we have not tapped.

I wonder. What unseen power lies within us? What gifts has God given us that we can use to bring joy to the world?

## BEER INTO FURNITURE

Whenever I preach on this passage I just have to use my favorite illustration. Some of you have heard it before, but I think this story ... just like some of us ... gets better with age.

The great commentator William Barclay told a story about a man who was a blue collar worker who loved to drink. In fact, he became an alcoholic and abused his family. He frittered away their money on strong drink and other worthless causes.

But, one day the man met Jesus, and he was changed by that encounter. He quit drinking and became more responsible in his lifestyle. Everyone was happy about the change ... everyone that is except his drinking buddies.

He worked with them every day, and they teased him unmercifully about his new religion. One day one of these ex-friends said derisively, "Surely you don't believe all those miracle stories in the Bible. For instance, you don't really believe that Jesus turned water into wine?"

The new convert replied, "I don't know about Jesus turning water into wine, but my own life he has turned beer into furniture."

That's what this miracle is all about ... about the power of Jesus to transform things ... water into wine ... beer into furniture ... anger into love ... unbelief into faith ... sorrow into joy.

When Jesus comes things change ... and more importantly people change.

Are you running on empty? Is the joy gone from your life? Do you need to be filled with something more?

I believe that Jesus still brings us a taste of new wine. I believe that Jesus gives us so much that we can dare to share with everyone.

You see, my friends this miracle is much greater than it first seems. It's not just about what happened at a wedding party long ago. It's about what is happening in our lives here and now.

Are you willing to do what Jesus tells you to do? Do you believe that Jesus can fill your cup to the brim with hope and new life?

I believe. I believe that Jesus still turns water into wine.

Amen.