

**More Than a Wedding**  
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**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.

**ACCIDENTS WAITING TO HAPPEN**

Whenever I counsel with couples who are planning to married, I tell them all the same thing.

Weddings are accidents waiting to happen.

The question is not “if” something is going to go wrong.

The question is “what is going to go wrong?”

Sometimes the couple is reluctant to believe this.

After all, they’ve been planning the happy event for many months.

They want their wedding to be “perfect.”

But, I remind them that even though they want their marriage ceremony to be perfect, people are not perfect. And as long as people are involved in large numbers, something is going to go wrong.

So what's the happy couple to do?

I purpose that they roll with the punches and accept the inevitable imperfections that will be a part of their ceremony.

In fact I even suggest that these "imperfections" may become some of their most cherished memories.

## NO WINE

Today's Scripture is a good example of my point.

Jesus and his disciples are invited to a wedding.

And something goes wrong.

They run out of wine.

Now for us this doesn't seem like a big deal.

After all the Bible tells us that they've been at it for three days!

No wonder the wine has run out.

Turn out the lights, the party's over. Right?

But, we need to remember that in those days a wedding was not a one day affair.

It was a seven day feast at the groom's home.

And in a culture where hospitality is considered a sacred duty, running out of wine was no minor glitch. It was a big problem.

Jesus' mother notices the potential crisis and comes to her son for help.

"Jesus, they're running out of wine."

And Jesus responds, "Hey, woman, this is not my problem."

But, Mary is not discouraged by Jesus' response.

Instead, she tells the guys in charge of serving the wine,

"Do whatever Jesus tells you to do."

## WINE IN ABUNDANCE

And so Jesus does do something.

He tells them,

"Fill those big 20 gallon jugs with water, and take it to the head waiter."

So, they do it.

And when the head waiter takes a sample, he is amazed.

He says,

“Well, most people serve the best wine first when everyone can appreciate it. And then they serve the Boone’s Farm when everyone is too drunk to notice. But, you have saved the best wine for last. Let the party continue!”

And thus ends the first of Jesus’ miracles.

It is, John tells us, a sign of God’s glory, and it is this miracle that causes the disciples to believe in Jesus.

## CELEBRATION

What does it mean that in John’s gospel one of the first things Jesus does is attend a wedding and turns water into wine?

Sometimes I wonder if we’ve portrayed Jesus and the kingdom of God in the wrong way.

Maybe our worship services are too serious and solemn.

Maybe we’ve got too much frozen chosen and not enough party hardy?

Maybe the kingdom of God is a giant celebration, like a wedding feast.

This miracle suggests to me that God loves to hear the laughter of people celebrating.

The kingdom of God is like a party where the wine never runs dry.

Could it be that the kingdom of God is more like the tailgating that we do on Saturday than the staid services we hold on Sunday?! It’s possible.

This was a criticism leveled against Jesus. The religious authorities said that he was a “glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34)

(Now, of course, this was a critique leveled at Jesus by his adversaries. Jesus wasn’t a glutton and a drunkard. And when we use this imagery we should be aware that many struggle with eating and drinking to excess. This language of celebration is not meant to undermine those who struggle with these problems.)

But, on the other hand, Jesus was a person that you might invite to a party. In the gospels Jesus shows up at quite a few dinner parties. And Jesus uses the image of a wedding celebration as a metaphor for the kingdom of God.

In fact, Jesus said on more than one occasion that the kingdom of God would be like a wedding feast. And all you had to do was accept the invitation and come to the party. How can we reflect this sense of joy and celebration in the way we worship God?

## MORAVIAN LOVE FEAST

Several weeks ago I got an idea. When I was in Texas visiting my new granddaughter, the whole family went to the small church that Carrie and Sebastian have joined.

This particular service was a bit different.  
It was their version of a Moravian Love Feast.

First, we sat around tables and served each other cake, cocoa and marshmallows, and coffee.

Second, we discussed a Scripture passage informally, and then shared our insights with the whole group.

And finally, we read liturgy normally associated with the Lord's Supper. Instead of having a symbolic meal, we had more of a real meal that was consecrated in a special way.

(By the way, lest you think this is somehow unbiblical, Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians warns that about eating too much and getting drunk at the Lord's table before everyone arrives.

This suggests to me that when the church first celebrated the faith it was more of a party than the very formal symbolic service that our Lord's Supper has become.

Paul didn't say they shouldn't have a party. He just wanted to make sure that everyone was included in the party!)

I must say that this unique service and the sense of joy and welcome that I felt at this church in Houston deeply moved me. I thought, "Maybe more church services should be like this."

Maybe we ought to put more emphasis on the miracle of turning water into wine.  
 Maybe the fellowship meal is just as important as the Bible study.  
 Maybe the Spirit of God in Christ is at heart a Spirit of celebration.

## ENJOY

What is the chief end of men and women?  
 The Catechism tells us it is to glorify God and to enjoy God forever.

The key word is enjoy.  
 Jesus turns water into wine, and we toast the world with the amazing good news of God's grace.

God is not revealed to the world in a spirit of judgment.  
 God is revealed to the world in a Spirit of celebration and hope for the future.

How do we express God's amazing grace?  
 What is it like?

It's like turning water into wine.  
 It's like a party that just won't end.  
 It's like getting the best wine when you're expecting the cheap stuff.

It's eating cake and coffee with people whom you have just met you ... but who treat you like long lost friends.

It's not enough just to talk about the grace of God.  
 Somehow we have to taste it.  
 Somehow we have to *experience* what it's like to glorify and *enjoy* the presence of God.

Theologian Robert Hotchkins put it this way,

“Christians ought to be celebrating constantly.  
 We ought to be preoccupied with parties, banquets, feasts and merriment.

We ought to give ourselves over to ... joy because we have been liberated from the fear of life and the fear of death. We ought to attract people to the church quite literally by the fun there is in being a Christian.”

I don't know about you, but my experience of the Christian faith hasn't always been like that.

But, I think it can be.

I think that we can share the joy of following Jesus by the way we relate to each other.

Let's make it a party, and let's invite everyone to the table.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF A WEDDING CELEBRATION

No wedding ceremony is adequate for the love that it celebrates and the hope that it embodies. But, even a small and imperfect celebration is important and necessary.

It marks the joining of a man and woman in holy matrimony.

It is a celebration of a promise that is to last until "death do us part."

It conveys hope for the future.

In a wedding families are joined together, and new families are created.

And weddings, at their best, are about more than just the bride and groom.

The wedding prayer from the Book of Common Worship says it well.

The couple's life together is a "sign of Christ's love to this sinful and broken world."

It is a place where "unity may overcome estrangement, forgiveness may heal guilt and joy may conquer despair."

## A SYMBOL OF THE COMING KINGDOM

The wedding feast is a metaphor for the kingdom of God.

The Bible consistently uses it in this way.

You see, today's lesson is about more than wedding.

It is a sign of the coming kingdom.

It is an echo of grace to come.

Every detail in the story reflects the details in another, greater story.

For example, it was on the "third day" that the wine ran out and the miracle happened.

And of course on the “third day” resurrection changed death into life eternal.

In the Lord’s Supper wine represents the cup of salvation. His blood was shed for us, and he tells all of us to drink from that cup as we remember him.

And so the cup of salvation is always full when we follow the Savior who turns water into wine.

Did you notice that when Mary asks Jesus to help with the wine, he says that it’s not his problem, but he also says something rather cryptic and unusual, “My hour has not yet come.”

In John’s gospel this phrase refers to the time of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Jesus is aware that there is more going on than just a wedding. He knows that everything he does reflects upon the kingdom that comes.

And maybe he wonders how helping replenish the wine at a party fits in with that kingdom.

At first this seems to make him reluctant to help.  
“Woman, this is not my problem.”

But, then it must have occurred to him that this miracle was about more than wine and a wedding. It was the beginning of his ministry. It was a foretaste of things to come.

Later John will talk about the wedding feast of the Lamb in his Revelation of the end time.

What did this wedding and wine have to do with Jesus?  
Everything.

The prophets in the Hebrew Bible spoke about the coming kingdom in this way, “... the mountains shall drip with sweet wine and all the hills shall flow with it.” (Amos 9:13; cf. Joel 3:18)

Wine in abundance was a sign of the coming kingdom. Jesus gets it, and he begins his ministry with a celebration.

## ABUNDANT, ETERNAL LIFE

And so Jesus not only turns water into wine, he turns six, twenty gallon jugs of water into wine. And it is not just any wine.

It is the best wine anyone has ever tasted.

This is not just about a wedding.

This miracle foreshadows the coming of God's kingdom.  
When the kingdom comes, the wine and the joy overflow and never run out.

There's enough for everyone at the wedding feast of the Lamb. This is a party that will not end.

To put it another way, life with Jesus is abundant.  
And life with Jesus is eternal.

Mary brought Jesus what seems like a mundane problem.  
"We're running low on wine."

But, as it turns out, the problem was an opportunity to proclaim the joy of the kingdom that comes. It became a symbol of eternal hope, and enabled the disciples of Jesus to have faith.

## WHEN THE WINE RUNS OUT

So, what do we do when the wine runs out?  
What do we do when the joy of life is running dry, and it looks like the party is over?

I suggest we take our cue from Mary.  
We bring our request to Jesus and trust him for the miracle that we need.

Mary told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you to do."

And maybe we should take Mary's advice to heart.  
What is Jesus telling us to do?  
Where is Jesus calling us to trust in the the miracle of God's abundant grace?

Joy is not something that we can create for ourselves.

Joy comes from above and beyond us.  
 Joy is a miracle born of hope and faith.

It's like a wedding where the wine never runs out.

When Jesus first turned water into wine, only the disciples saw and believed in the miracle.

And their understanding was incomplete.

But, later Christians would understand the significance of this miracle.

It was a sign, the first sign that Jesus was different.  
 His kingdom would not lay a burden on the people.  
 His kingdom would bring in a reign of hope and joy.

He would change water into wine and despair into hope.  
 His kingdom would fulfill the words of the Psalmist,  
 "Weeping may linger for the night,  
 but joy comes in the morning." (Psalm 30:5)

When Jesus came, the night of weeping was over and the joy of new wine had come to God's people.

And as the hymn puts it,  
 "Morning has broken like the first morning."

We have seen the sign of things to come.  
 And that makes each moment special.  
 In his commentary on this passage Frederick Buechner wrote,

"... whenever there is need and Jesus is on the scene, resurrection and abundance are right around the corner.

And knowing this makes all the difference.  
 ... every moment that we live in Jesus ... has the capacity to mediate the divine.

Bread and wine can bear Christ's body and blood.  
 An ordinary hug can convey unbounded love and blessing.  
 The smallest donation of food or money can tip the balance between scarcity and abundance.

A simple act of kindness can make all the difference in the world.  
And a smile, shared at just the right time, can shed light into the darkest of places.”

Has the wine run out in your life?

Come to Jesus and ask for the miracle of an abundant life.  
He calls us from emptiness to excess.  
He calls us from the least to the best.

Remember.

When Jesus is present, “resurrection and abundance are right around the corner”.

Amen.