

Water into Wine

John 2:1-11

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Did it ever occur to you that Jesus liked to laugh? That is the clear implication of John 2:2, “Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.” You don’t go to weddings without expecting to laugh and anticipating fun: the cuteness of the flower girls and ring bearers; the tinkling of glasses at the reception; the hokey toasts given by the best man; the cutting of the cake; the tossing of flowers. We all know the drill, and we go because it is fun and we know we are going to smile. Jesus was a profoundly happy man, and he came to bring joy to the world. In John 17:13, Jesus says, “I have said these things...so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them.” Paul went on to say that the kingdom of heaven is righteousness, peace and joy (Romans 14:17).

There is a shortage of joy in the world these days. People are weighed down with unemployment, debt, divorce and despair. They speak in cynical and sarcastic tones about nearly everything. It should not be so among Christians. We are following a Man of Joy, and we should be joyful as befits our leader. John Wesley famously remarked, “Sour godliness is the devil’s religion.” Are you a joyful Christian? The identifying mark of Christ in your heart is joy.

What is a miracle? Simply put it is an unexpected event that reveals the power of God. God gives us miracles, not to do personal favors for us or to make life easier for us. God gives miracles to spur us to faith. John 20:30-31 says, “Jesus did many other miraculous signs...which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ...” Miracles continue to happen all around us. Jesus even gives his followers the power to be part of his miracles: “I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do greater things than these because I am going to the Father.” (John 14:12) For the next few weeks, I don’t want to just talk to you about miracles, I want us to hear and heed God’s invitation to be a part of the many wonders he wants to do through us and our church.

The miracle before us is elaborated in John 2:9, “The master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine.” It is a nature miracle that shows Jesus’ power over natural forces. I happen to know that one of our members has this miracle in her backyard every year. The heavy rains that fell upon her grape arbor this past week will in three months be turned into

wine. Jesus has not broken any natural laws, he has only speeded them up! On the third day of creation (Genesis 1:11), God created the grapevine; so it is only fitting that on the third day of his ministry, Jesus also should make water into wine. Jesus is not just another spell-binding religious preacher; he is God the creator come in the flesh. That is the glory of this miracle. It's not just a magic trick done to keep a party going, but it is a window into the true nature of Christ. So it is fitting that we sing the old hymn:

Fairest Lord Jesus, ruler of all nature, O Thou of God and Man the Son,
Thee will I cherish, thee will I honor, thou my soul's glory, joy and crown.

But there also is something deeper here. In John 2:6, we see six empty stone water jars used for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding from 20 to 30 gallons. Not only does this wedding lack wine, they are also out of water!

We need to consider the symbolic value of wine in the Old Testament to truly understand this miracle. Wine was the traditional symbol of joy and gladness as in Psalm 4:7 "You have filled my heart with greater joy than when their grain and new wine abound."

Wine also represents the just and righteous nation that God was looking for, but Israel failed to produce, as in Isaiah 5:4 "When I looked for good grapes, why did it yield only bad?"

Finally, wine represented the coming of the Christ and the final salvation of the world: "On this mountain, the LORD almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the finest wine...he will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces..." (Isaiah 25:6, 8)

With this miracle in John 2, Jesus announces that he is our joy! He is our righteousness! And He is the Messiah come to defeat death and sorrow from the earth! What the Jewish law was powerless to do because of our sinful nature, Jesus accomplishes. His death frees us from sin and death and transforms us into a new creation.

If Jesus just wanted to help these people out of a jam, he would have just run down to Wal-Mart and picked up a couple of gallons of Gallo. But he saw an opportunity to announce himself as the Christ, and that is what this miracle is all about. Jesus can transform our despair into joy; our sin into his righteousness; and our death into life. He is the transformational leader for the entire human race.

We United Methodists say that our mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the *transformation* of the world. Our hope and prayer is to be a transformed people who, with God's

help, transform the world. Membership is not a matter of putting names on a list buried in a file cabinet in the church office. Membership is a matter of building people who make a difference; people who are out to be part of Jesus' transforming miracles in the world.

For this transformation to happen, four things need to happen. The first thing is that we must recognize what Mary did at the wedding: that the world "has no wine." Twenty-five thousand people a day die of hunger and malnutrition. Nearly one-half of marriages in America fail. Every thirty seconds a child dies of Malaria. There is loneliness, addiction and despair all around us. People are living without God and without hope. The prelude to a miracle is to see the need for one.

The second thing that has to happen is for us to recognize that we have a Savior and he is Jesus Christ! Mary knew this, or she would not have asked him to intervene. We must pray for God to intervene. We must pray that God would send to us the broken people, the divorced, the depressed and the fatherless. We must become an intervening people and a praying people. Author Ken Callahan speaks of two kinds of churches: the first is the Bo-Peep church that focuses on its members and its programs. The Bo-Peep church sings this little ditty: "Little Bo-Peep has lost her sheep and can't tell where to find them. *Leave them alone* and they'll come home wagging their tails behind them." Bo-Peep churches don't pray and they certainly don't intervene. The second kind of church is the Good Shepherd church who goes out in search of every lost sheep. The Good Shepherd church knows it's not about keeping yesterday's programs going; it's about finding lost sheep and intervening to bring them to the Savior.

The third thing that must happen is obedience. Mary is our model for this. When the angel told her she would bear the Christ child she responded, "Let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38). In John 2:5 she says something similar: "Do whatever he tells you." That should be the slogan for the Christian life. There really is one and only one moral absolute: Jesus Christ is Lord and we should do whatever he tells us to do.

You don't need a mega-church of 4,000 people to change the world. All you need is one person who is willing to put on a gasoline suit and storm the gates of hell because Jesus asked him to. Peter was such a man. So was John Wesley, and so might we be.