

**Sermon for 1-20-19**  
**Gospel -- John 2:1-11**

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Turning water into wine... it's kind of a weird miracle, right?

It doesn't seem to fit with a typical Jesus miracle story (if you can call any of his miracles 'typical'). Our Lord spent a lot of time healing the sick and suffering and infirm, raising the dead (both freshly dead and a few days gone), feeding crowds of thousands, casting out demons and other forces of evil, and controlling nature in surprising ways (like walking on water and calming a storm).

When you consider all of his miracles together, this one -- turning water into wine so people can continue partying at a wedding -- seems pretty frivolous, doesn't it? This wine, as amazing as it is (according to the chief steward), isn't saving anyone's life. This wine is not curing anyone from a debilitating illness. This wine is not freeing anyone from demonic possession or protecting anyone from the ravages of a terrifying storm. It's just really good wine.

It's not unreasonable to wonder why this story is included in the Gospel at all! We know that what we have in the four Gospels isn't everything Jesus ever did in his life, of course; the Bible would be a lot longer if it included everything. We trust and believe that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John were inspired by God to write the most important highlights, the essentials, the teachings and events that we, living two thousand years later, need to know in

order to hear and understand the Good News of Jesus Christ. The four evangelists are our primary storytellers, and we, along with millions of others around the world, find in their work the very foundation of our faith.

Back to water and wine... only John includes this story. This miracle doesn't appear in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. Why is this miracle important enough for John to include it? And not just include it, but give it symbolic and theological prominence? Look at that last verse: "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."<sup>i</sup>

According to John, this was Christ's first miracle, his first "sign," the beginning of his public ministry. It was also the moment when he "revealed his glory" -- the King James version says he "*manifested forth his glory*" (I **love** that!). For John, this is the Epiphany moment. Not the arrival of the magi, not the voice from heaven after Christ's baptism, but this -- Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding.

For John, this miracle is so much more than just preventing the ultimate 'party foul.' This is the beginning of revelation, this is the moment when the disciples begin to understand. This is the first flash of divinity, the first display of magnificent holiness, the moment when the man named Jesus becomes known as the Lord called Christ.

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Imagine being there, alongside your friend Jesus, watching him as listens to his mother's words: "They have no wine."<sup>ii</sup> At first he

dismisses her concern -- why is this his problem? -- but then he gets quiet, and mulls it over for a few minutes. He rises from his seat, and maybe you tag along behind him, to see what he might do. He approaches the servants, the ones working behind the scenes during this celebration, and he points to the six enormous empty stone water jars, normally used for cleansing rituals. Jesus tells the servants to fill the jars with water, fill them up to the brim, and they do it.

Why, you might wonder, why put water in these cleansing jars? What difference will that make? But you keep quiet, and you watch. After the jars are filled, Jesus tells the servants to take a cup full from one of the jars, and give it to the chief steward, who is basically their boss, the head servant (and the one who's probably 'freaking out' about the wine problem).

So the servants do it; maybe giving each other meaningful looks with raised eyebrows, but they do as Jesus asks. They take a cup, a cup they think is full of water, over to the chief steward. As he takes his first sip, you're anticipating his reaction -- will he be angry? Will he yell at the servants, 'Why are you wasting my time with this water when we have a situation on our hands here?!'

But nothing like that happens. Instead, you watch as the chief steward's eyes widen, sparkling with delight. Maybe he takes another sip, just to be sure, or because it's so darn good. You see his smile, and you hear his incredulous words to the bridegroom: "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>iii</sup>

And imagine that this, **this** is the moment when your life, and your world, and everything you ever knew and will know changes. Your friend, your teacher, the one you've chosen to follow... this man is God made flesh. Jesus is Emmanuel, and this is your Epiphany.

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Now, bring yourself back to today, to this place and this time. Maybe now you can understand how this miracle at the wedding in Cana was the Epiphany moment for John, and for the disciples. But what does this wine mean to us today? What gift of Good News can we receive from this story?

Remember, this is John's Gospel, so we've got layers upon layers of symbolism here... But the most important one, the essential lesson of this Epiphany story, is ABUNDANCE.

**Abundance.** In John's Gospel, Christ is defined and encountered and experienced through abundance. John tells us as much in his prologue: "[T]he Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth... From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace."<sup>iv</sup>

Jesus is fullness, Jesus is grace upon grace, overflowing grace, abundant grace. And the miracle at the wedding at Cana is his first performance, his first tangible demonstration of who and what he is -- abundant grace and mercy and love and holiness, breaking into and dismantling this world of fear and pain and scarcity, bit by bit (or sip by sip).

The Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis (one of my favorite preachers) puts it this way: "*[T]he wedding at Cana rolls out the rest of the Gospel of John as one grace upon grace moment after another that we get to feel, see, touch, hear -- and in this case, taste. Because what does grace upon grace taste like? The best wine and gallons of it when you least expect it.*"<sup>v</sup>

For John, the very essence of Jesus Christ is abundance. Jesus means abundant nourishment for those who hunger, abundant forgiveness for those who sin, abundant liberation for those who are shamed and excluded, abundant joy for those who weep, abundant healing for those in pain, and abundant life for those who die.

This abundance is not restricted to the lucky few who knew Jesus during his earthly life. Remember, "He was in the beginning with God,"<sup>vi</sup> and he "will raise [us] up on the last day."<sup>vii</sup> Christ's abundance is **real** and **eternal**. Christ's love, and his grace, is **forever**. I'm not just talking about what happens after we die; I'm talking about how we live, in the here and now. We can live as true followers of Christ, we can choose to follow his command to love God and love our neighbors abundantly; and when we do that, Christ's abundance will save us from living lives governed by fear and greed and inadequacy.

You and I can make Christ known through our own acts of abundant generosity, mercy, and love, even and especially when it seems that all the generosity, mercy, and love in this world have **run out** .... We can overflow with goodness that blesses this

world, a world that needs the blessings of hope and peace and love and justice **right now**.

Now is the time to make Christ known. Now is the time to "reveal his glory." Now is the time to be Christ's abundantly loving, abundantly shining people, in our neighborhoods and in the world!

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<sup>i</sup> John 2:11

<sup>ii</sup> 2:3

<sup>iii</sup> 2:10

<sup>iv</sup> 1:14-16

<sup>v</sup> Lewis's "Abundance for All," found at [www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5276](http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=5276)

<sup>vi</sup> John 1:2

<sup>vii</sup> 6:40