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Water into Wine—Celebrating Life
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.

As I was studying this passage again for the sermon this week, I had lots of **questions**.

See in the gospel of John, this is the **first of seven** major signs, or miracles. This is the first time Jesus performs a miracle— and it’s turning water into wine at a rural wedding in Cana!

Why would Jesus do THIS as his first miracle?

Why not heal dozens of people at once?

Why not bring a bunch of outcasts back into their community?

Why not do something big? Splashy?

Instead Jesus provides wine for a rural wedding in the small town of Cana, just about 10 miles north of his hometown of Nazareth.

So maybe we need to know **about weddings** in his day.

Weddings were big back then, and wine was a necessity.

So, running out of wine would have been shameful, a major breach of hospitality.

Jewish weddings back at the time were a *week-long celebration* that begins at the bride's house, and continues in a parade all the way to the groom's home, where they get married in the doorway of the home, and the party goes on for 7 days, with the groom's family providing for the event.

Instead of a honeymoon, it was a *7 day open house* with good food and wine.

Wine was a natural part of the celebration, and the groom's family would have been expected to provide the wine for the guests until the very last day.

Of course you'd start with the best wine, as the party began.

But if you ran out of wine—that would be terrible.

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Wine was important in Jesus' day, much like it is in much of the world today.

In fact, all throughout the Bible, *wine is a symbol* of celebration, and joy.

What if this is key to why he did it?

But this was no simple miracle.

In the gospel of John, everything has *layers of meaning*.

First let's look at that *interaction between Jesus* and his mother Mary.

Jesus sounds rude—

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."

But if we look at the use of the *word 'woman'* in that day and time it was just a sign of respect, not being rude the way we hear it today.

And when he asks what concern is that to you and me, *my hour is not yet come*—well, remember that John is writing a gospel about Jesus living out his calling as the Savior, the Son of God.

Everything happens at the appropriate time.

John is reminding us of that.

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Mary obviously knows that Jesus can do something about the lack of wine, because she says to the servants, "***Do whatever he tells you.***"

Now it's important to know, this ***wasn't just any water.***

Jesus told them to use the 6 jars of purification.

This water was used by the Jews to purify themselves before and after eating, to wash their hands, and food, and dishes.

They were required by Jewish law to wash with this water.

He saw those jars and had the servants fill them up with water to the brim, Which would have been between 120 and 180 gallons.

And he turned that water into wine—and not just any wine.

The best wine.

Talk about making this a ***great party***—

Jesus turned a faltering wedding reception into an amazing celebration!

He helped the bridegroom avoid public shame,

And he turned the party into something even better for the last four days, than it had been for the first three days!

We don't want to miss the fact that all this happened ***on the third day***....

Could that be because something else is going to happen later, on the third day?

So after the servants fill the jars with water,

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.

So ***why*** would Jesus turn water into wine for his first miracle?

Well, he ***helped*** this family by performing this miracle.

Who knows, being close to his hometown, maybe he was very close to this family. Jesus helped the bridegroom, and in fact, gave him a great reputation of being extremely generous—***saving the best wine for the last.***

And remember what Jesus said later, about the ***first being last?***

So Jesus helps a family in need by turning the water into wine—
 but he didn't have to use the jars of purification,
 and he certainly didn't need to transform 180 gallons of water into wine!
 This was something spectacular,
 And it was a sign of extravagant **abundance!**

Think about **who Jesus was**—
 he was the **fulfillment** of all the prophecies about the Messiah,
 he was the **new thing** God was doing—sending his own Son into the world.

What if those purification jars symbolize the **old order** of God's people,
 The 613 laws that kept them on the straight and narrow way?

What if when Jesus transforms THAT water into wine,
 he is doing a **great new thing?**

What if he is bringing in the **new kingdom** of God, the good news,
 the **new life** that is possible by believing in him as the Son of God.

What if, he is transforming the **laws** of God into the **grace** of God?
 After all, he is turning water meant to keep people pure and holy before God,
 into wine that helps people celebrate and rejoice!

What if it's **no accident** that this was his first miracle?
 What if it was **purposeful, meaningful?**
 He is bringing God's love and grace in an **entirely new way.**
 He is ushering in the new life, life in the kingdom of God—
 A kingdom that is often compared to—you guessed it—a **feast.**
 A celebration.
 And he's doing it all in a little known place called Cana,
 Kind of the way he was **born** in a little known place like a manger in Bethlehem.

In John 10:10 Jesus says *I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.*
 That's Jesus—he's about **new life, and abundant life.**
 What if he turned 180 gallons of water into the best wine,
 To show that he has come to bring God's abundant life!

When his **disciples** see the miracle, and believe,
 What if they are aware of all this deeper meaning?

They are Jews, who know about the rites of purification, and the jars of water.
 They know about the meaning of wine at a wedding.
 And they know that Jesus has called them to a new way of life,
 And he's bringing in the new kingdom of God.
 What if this miracle proves it?

What if they also see something that we forget when we hear the story?
 They see ***Jesus having fun, and celebrating***—
 with all the other guests at a wedding party.

I think ***Jesus loved parties***.

What do you think?

I think Jesus loved to be with people, to celebrate, and enjoy life.

How often do we ***see Jesus*** in the scriptures—at a dinner party?
 Or a festival?

Or as a guest in someone's home?

I think Jesus loved life.

I think he loved celebrating life.

Jesus is a ***Savior who celebrates***.

If that's true, what does that mean ***to you***?

What does it mean that our Savior celebrates life?

What does that mean about ***our God***?

You know, that all throughout the Gospel of John,
 Jesus talks about ***JOY***—

Listen to Jesus in John 16:20-24:

Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into joy.

21 *When a woman is in labor, she has pain, ... But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world.*

22 *So you have pain now; but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.*

23 *On that day you will ask nothing of me. Very truly, I tell you, if you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you.*

24 *Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, so that your joy may be complete.*

In *John chapter 15* after he tells his followers to abide in Him just as he abides in the Father, after he says stay attached to him, like branches to the vine, he says

My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.

9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.

11 I have said these things to you so that my JOY may be in you, and that your JOY may be complete.

Jesus is very clear that he comes to **bring us Joy**.

He is the giver of Joy!

He is the source of Joy!

And he sends us the Holy Spirit, so we will have that Joy forever.

Do you know that Mother Teresa once said,

“A person ***filled with joy preaches without preaching.***”

It’s interesting, one of the things we learned about Mother Teresa after her death is how she struggled with depression, and loneliness,

And yet she experienced, and shared, so much of Christ’s joy.

She was filled with that joy.

Joy can come even in life’s struggles and sorrows,

Some would say, especially in them.

Jesus is our model for that.

And Jesus is our model for celebrating!

Pastor Robert M. Brearley says

“God does not want our religion to be too holy to be happy in.

Throughout his life and his ministry, Jesus of Nazareth ***celebrated people***—

people getting married, people being healed of disease and deformity,

people enjoying meals together.

He carried a ***spirit of celebration*** with him wherever he went as he proclaimed a God of mercy and peace and ***joy***.

This joyous feast at Cana is still a sign to the church that we are to ***rejoice*** in the people of God

and to ***toast*** the world with the amazing good news of grace.”

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I love that!

We should *rejoice in the people of God*,

And *toast the world with the amazing good news of grace!*

So how do we *do that?*

How do we *celebrate* the good news of God's grace?

University of Chicago theologian Robert Hotchkins remarks that

“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” Manning, Brennan. *The Ragamuffin Gospel*. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 1990), pg. 143-44.

That's a really interesting question for the church---

do we *attract people* to the church by the fun in being a Christian?

You know, this makes me think of how special

the *Fellowship team* in this church really is—

they are the people making sure we take time, to have a good time!

And think about what's happening with our *kids and youth*.

We don't want to overlook the importance of lessons they are learning, but it's just as important for them to *celebrate and have fun!*

That's part of learning how to be a Christian—

Learning how to have fun as one!

What about you?

How *do you celebrate?*

How do you find moments to do so, in the midst of a hard week?

Where do find little rays of light, and hope in darkness?

Is it in music? Quiet? The outdoors? Your car?

Where do you experience God giving you a little joy?

Do you take time to notice the little things all around us—that we can celebrate?

Life has been pretty hard lately, so I was thrilled when a pastor friend of mine shared a hilarious SNL skit with me that is, well, mostly funny for people like pastors....so we just laughed and laughed...and I still laugh just thinking about it.

What has brought a smile to your face lately?

So many times it's worship.

I love worship, because each week there's something *different to enjoy*.

All different kinds of music, and liturgy,

And we get to hear GOOD news in this Bad news world!

Friends, hear the *Good News* of the Gospel today!

When Jesus turned that water into wine,

He was *celebrating*—so that we would in turn celebrate

The good news of great joy!

May we all take the time to celebrate our faith,

And our salvation in Jesus Christ. Amen.