

**It's a Wedding! - Rev. Denise Stone**

**Text: John 2:1-11**

**FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 01-16-2022**

What are some common elements of modern Weddings?

*(wait for answers)*

Engagement, planning, dress buying, picking out a venue, florist, caterer, a minister. Inviting guests. Bridal and Bachelor parties. Then there is the actual ceremony – vows – traditional or written, and of course the reception.

A lot goes into putting together a wedding. And rarely does everything go off without a least one or more issues. I was at a wedding in an un-airconditioned chapel once. One of the bridesmaids passed out just before the minister pronounced them husband and wife.

We've all heard stories of the flower-girl or ring-bearer having a tantrum, or the caterer not showing.

Weddings are supposed to be all joy-filled events. Sometimes, stress or problems seem to override the joy.

Weddings in Jesus' day were just as complicated, even more, than ours are today given that they were seven-day feasts at the groom's home. And just like today, sometimes things go wrong.

Hear today's passage from the Gospel of John, chapter 2.

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2 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.<sup>i</sup>

The Word of the Lord.

**Thanks be to God.**

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“This celebration is in trouble, because the wine is giving out before the party is over. The situation constitutes a crisis for the family who shoulders the responsibility of hospitality.”<sup>ii</sup>

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It is Jesus’ mother that notices the problem and mentions it to Jesus. Mary does not actually ask Jesus to do anything, and Jesus’ response may appear to be rude, but in reality, Jesus is just making a statement that it really is not their issue. Perhaps knowing Jesus as well as she did, Mary just assumed he would intervene – since she told the servants to do what Jesus tells them to do.

While Jesus seems reluctant to do anything, based on his own words, we have no indication that he really was annoyed or bothered by the turn of events – other than saying his time had not yet come.

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Short aside – Jesus says that his time has not come several times in the Gospel of John, until it was time for his death and resurrection. So, we probably should not read much into that statement to Mary.

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Jesus tells the servants to fill the 6 ritual water jars full with water. This was probably not a quick task since each held 20-30 gallons of water. That's up to 180 gallons of water total.

Once they had completed their task, Jesus tells them to take some of the water to the Chief Steward – the party planner, if you will.

Now no one other than Jesus, the servants and presumably his mother know where this drink has come from.

The Chief Steward then pulls the bridegroom aside and makes the comment, “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.”

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Jesus has turned the water into wine. His first miracle, or sign, as the Gospel of John calls them.

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Of all the things that you might think would be Jesus' first miracle, this one would seem to be out of place.

Let's face it – we know Jesus healed the sick and infirm, he cast out demons and even raised a man from the dead.

In the grand scheme of things, a wedding feast running out of wine seems a little *under*whelming of a need.

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This event, however, has much to teach us about the Kingdom of God.

First, quoting Robert M. Brearley, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Crichton College in Memphis, TN,

Sometimes the church has forgotten that our Lord once attended a wedding feast and said yes to gladness and joy. Prompted by his earthly mother, Jesus turned water into wine to point us to his heavenly Father, a God who loves to hear the laughter of people celebrating people. Sometimes the church has forgotten to live the joy of such revelation.<sup>iii</sup>

Have you ever been around someone at any church or Christian gathering who was just a real sourpuss? The thought of them smiling made you wonder if their face would crack. Sometimes we have forgotten to live our lives as followers of Christ with true joy and enthusiasm.

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The next thing that we can glean from today's story is that it is not just about a wedding.

In John's Gospel, miracles or signs, are events that point beyond themselves to teach us something else.

So what does Jesus attending a wedding and changing the water into wine point to beyond the surface of the story?

Professor Elisabeth Johnson tells us that,

The image of the wedding banquet is used frequently in Scripture as a picture of the restoration of Israel, and

wine is frequently used as a symbol of the joy and celebration associated with salvation. Amos speaks of the day when “the mountains shall drip sweet wine. and all the hills shall flow with it,” for example (Amos 9:13). Isaiah speaks of the feast that God will prepare for all peoples, “a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines ... of well-aged wines strained clear” (Isaiah 25:6). The abundance of fine wine is a symbol of the abundance of joy that awaits not only Israel, but all peoples on the day of God’s salvation.

Jesus’ extravagant miracle of changing the water into wine is a sign that in him, life, joy, and salvation have arrived.<sup>iv</sup>

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Life, Joy and Salvation.

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Christians have the secret that the Wedding Feast at Cana wants to tell us.

Are we celebrating, truly celebrating, every Sunday. Are we having parties every day of the week?

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True, in the last couple of years we have had to deal with the COVID virus putting limits on our ability to gather as freely as we would like.

But even now, do we celebrate life, joy and salvation on a regular basis? Or do we live up to the Presbyterian caricature of the “Frozen Chosen?” When we’ve sung joyful, moving hymns and spirituals – do we clap our hands, allow our feet to tap?

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Finally, I would like you to consider the possibility that Jesus’ turning the water into wine shows us an act of abundant grace.

Professor Karoline Lewis suggests,

Turning water into wine is revealing of abundant grace in this season of Epiphany. And what does abundant grace taste like? Like the best wine when you are expecting the cheap stuff. It’s one thing to say, “Jesus is the source of grace.” It’s quite another to have an experience of it. So much of our preaching tends toward telling people *about* Jesus. What if in the season of Epiphany, we commit to creating experiences of Jesus so that there can be no doubt that Christmas was real?<sup>v</sup>

What would it look like if we truly lived and worshipped like we had no doubt that Christmas was real, and that joy and laughter were meant to be central expressions of our Christian life?

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From our passage today we are reminded,

- that we have a God who loves to hear the laughter of people celebrating people
- that “Jesus’ extravagant miracle of changing the water into wine is a sign that in him, life, joy, and salvation have arrived.”
- that God offers abundant grace – like the best wine when you are expecting the cheap stuff

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Again, what would it look like if we truly lived and worshipped like we had no doubt that Christmas was real, and that joy and laughter were meant to be central expressions of our Christian life?

Consider that question this morning.

Let us pray.

How can we not sing your praise  
with heart and soul  
and proclaim your name  
throughout the world?  
God of creation,  
Awesome in power,  
Sustainer,  
Provider,  
Savior,



Father of all,  
there is none like you!  
How can we not declare your glory  
through all that we are,  
and proclaim your name  
throughout this world?<sup>vi</sup>  
Let it be – AMEN.

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<sup>i</sup> Scripture passages are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>ii</sup> Feasting on the Word, p. 260.

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid. pp. 260 and 262.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-john-21-11-8>.

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-john-21-11-4>.

<sup>vi</sup> [https://www.faithandworship.com/prayers\\_Epiphany.htm#gsc.tab=0](https://www.faithandworship.com/prayers_Epiphany.htm#gsc.tab=0).