



"Looking For A Sign"
Rev. Dr. Scott Field
John 2: 1-11
January 20, 2019
9:15 AM Service

When Jesus and The Disciples Crashed the Wedding in Cana

Jesus likes weddings.

Cana (there are two possible locations for ancient Cana) was within walking distance of Nazareth.

A wedding celebration would last about seven days.

Jesus was invited probably because he was a relative of the bride or groom. Note that his mother was also at the wedding. Jesus was also becoming something of a local celebrity and a guest you'd want to add some extra notoriety to your wedding.

Running out of wine, however, was a major social embarrassment. It's the sort of thing that your name would be attached to for years. Sort of like poor Cody Parkey and the missed field goal. "Don't pull a Parkey on us" -- which means anything that results in a near miss when victory is in your grasp. "Don't pull a ben-Yehuda on us" -- which would mean being cheap on the wine after inviting all the guests.

A couple of other sidelights on this situation:

Guests to a wedding were often expected to bring some wine with them and also help defray the costs of the celebration. Apparently, Jesus brought neither wine nor money. Not only that, Jesus didn't bring a +1, but a +4 with Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip and Nathanael (see John 1 for the earliest disciples of Jesus). This might explain his mother's comment to him: "They're running out of wine."

It seems clear that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was inferring he ought to do something about it. Maybe she's a little embarrassed because he and his peeps didn't bring any wine with them and showed up without any cash to help the cause. His response, which might seem gruff to us, indicates that he's on his own time schedule...but it was his mother that made the remark. And this may be one of those very human family dynamics where if momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy. Just sayin'...

At any event, Jesus directs the servants to fill up the stone jars with water. These are large jars -- holding something like 25 gallons each. This would mean that Jesus was making about 150 gallons of wine. And not just some cardboard box vintage, but, as the master of ceremonies for the celebration put it, "this is better than the wine at the first toast for the newlyweds." The gospel account adds the detail that the water jars had been filled to the brim which indicates that this was not just a lot of water to which some wine had been added. In Roman times it was pretty common to stretch the wine at a celebration by diluting it with water...not the case here.

This account has led to a number of interpretations:

The Baptists have overlooked the obvious to conclude it wasn't wine at all, but unfermented grape juice -- as if Jesus could do a miracle of water to grape juice, but couldn't quite bring himself to actually produce wine.

Roman Catholic teachings on Mariology, the veneration of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, generally seize upon this account in Scripture as proof positive that if you talk to his mother, she can persuade Jesus to do what you want.

The Episcopalians more generally are just delighted to hear that Jesus is a fan of fine wine.

The very good news about the Gospel of John is that we are not very often left wondering what the point of the story happens to be. John tells us.

v. 11 This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

This unexpected miracle, water changed to wine, despite helping fuel the festivities of the wedding reception, reveals something about Jesus. You and I think of wine as the sign of a good time -- the Bible views wine as a sign of a GREAT time, the COMING TIME, the time of God's blessing, the fulfillment of God's promises. This is underscored in the abundance of wine Jesus produced. Not a bottle. Not a case of bottles. But 150 gallons of the best of the best.

Actually, when the Gospel observes that this is the first of the signs, it is because, in the Gospel of John, there are seven miracles that are identified as "signs" which reveal Jesus as the Messiah and Lord.

The "seven signs" we might call miracles -- the intervention of God's power to change the normal course of things. Here they are from the Gospel of John:

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| 1. Water changed to wine | John 2:1-11 |
| 2. Healing of the Official's Son | John 4: 46-54 |
| 3. Healing of the Lame Man | John 6:1-13 |
| 4. Feeding a Multitude | John 6:1-13 |
| 5. Walking on the Water | John 6:17-21 |
| 6. Giving sight to the blind | John 9:1-8 |
| 7. Raising Lazarus from the dead | John 11:1-45 |

Throughout the gospel of John there are mixed reactions to these "signs":

Some respond as if Jesus is a miracle-worker and bring their situations to him like a visit to the doctor or the chiropractor.

Some taunt him derisively and ask for another sign, a bigger sign, a better sign or they won't believe.

Some see Jesus as a fraud. Others see him as a tool of the devil. His opponents see themselves as much too intelligent and sophisticated to be taken in by miracles, signs, and wonders.

These sorts of reactions to Jesus are not confined to the first century -- they are with us, in fact, sometimes very closely and personally with us, in the twenty-first century. Right here this morning.

There are watered down versions of Jesus in which we confine him to being a political reformer, or social activist, or hell-fire-and-brimstone evangelist, a wise sage like Oprah or Dr. Phil, or a law-and-order administrator like Judge Judy.

But some people recognize something in the miracles, something that indicates it is a sign of Jesus' identity, power, and authority.

As a result, at that wedding when the wine was produced from the water in the stone jars, the first disciples, Simon Peter, Andrew, Philip, and Nathanael, take a step deeper in their connection with Jesus. They had been tagging along with Jesus, but now, the Bible records, they "believed" in him.

This is, actually the stated purpose of including the miracle account in John's Gospel:

"The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name." John 20:30,31 NLT

The response to the "signs" to which we are invited is straightforward:

Jesus is Lord

Believing in Jesus leads to life full, abundant, and eternal

Not so fast, Preacher!

You might be thinking that changing water to wine may have worked with those people back then, but what do the miracles of Jesus have to do with you and me here and now?

That's a great question!

The miracles have everything to do with you and me here and now; because if Jesus can be put in one of our boxes of identity, well, then, we can either take him along as a companion deity, a Comfortable

God, or simply leave God alone until we need some emergency divine help or until there's nobody else left to blame when things don't go our way.

That's how it is if Jesus, watered down Jesus, is just a nice guy, a moral teacher, or an example of a really excellent human being.

But if the miracles are actually signs that he is the Lord of the universe and the hope of the world, then they indicate that he is really the Judge of the Living and the Dead, that he is the center of all things and in him all things hold together (Colossians 1); well, that changes everything for us here and now.

Of course, we might, like so many, want to rationalize and miniaturize the miracles, the signs, of Jesus.

Maybe that person wasn't really healed, they just got over their illness.

Maybe that wasn't demon possession, but a case of mental confusion caused by hypoglycemia; once that supposedly demon-possessed dude got a little sugar in his system, he was right as rain.

And speaking of rain, remember that storm on the Sea of Galilee that scared the thunder out of the fisherman? Maybe it was just a squall line that passed through and the calm returned.

But what about the big one -- the unique claim Christ-followers have affirmed everywhere and always? You know what I'm talking about. What happened on the Third Day.

Jesus, after his arrest, torture, and execution on the cross, on the third day, he was raised from the dead -- literally, personally, and victoriously. This is the essential historical fact behind the Christian movement. The Apostle Paul summarized the heart of the gospel this way:

"Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures; he was buried, and on the third day he was raised from the dead, according to the Scriptures."

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

Paul goes on, knowing our skeptical minds, to list a number of eyewitnesses to Jesus after the resurrection.

That's not Oprah or Dr. Phil. Not Judge Judy.

That's the Savior sent from Heaven, the Lord of the Universe and the Hope of the World -- the one and only Jesus Christ.

All of the miracles of Jesus are signs, indicators of his identity. The earliest confession of the earliest Christians was simple and direct: Jesus is Lord.

And if Jesus is Lord, then I am not.

Jesus is Lord of my resources:

My time - one day each week as Sabbath to remind me that the Lord keeps the world turning without me pushing it; that rest rather than anxious activity expresses my trust that my times are in God's hands.

My money - a portion of my money is to be given away as a testimony that I trust God will continue to provide and that, like God, I, too, can be generous toward others.

My influence and abilities - are to be used to serve and support others; I seek the good of all rather than simply accumulating resources for myself.

Jesus is Lord of my relationships:

Every other person I meet is created in the image of God. C.S. Lewis observed that a Christ-follower never meets an ordinary person -- all are extraordinary creations of Almighty God with amazing gifts, potential, and capacities. Because of this, I treat everyone with respect.

I can leave the judging of others in God's hands rather than hand down my own verdict.

I recognize that I am created for relationships and that God has placed me in the family of faith -- called the church. I cannot get along without the community of brothers and sisters in Christ.

The primary dynamic of relationships is love -- love for others that reflects the love of God for us all.

Jesus is Lord of my rewards:

Jesus determines what counts. He determines how we keep score -- how much and how many I have is not an accurate measure of value.

My future is in the Lord's hands and judgment has already been announced: bought and paid for by the blood of Christ.

Here's the amazing, almost too good to be true secret:

When Jesus is Lord of my resources, I can count on having enough of whatever I need because he has promised to provide for me.

When Jesus is Lord of my relationships I can resign as the judge of everybody else and I have an unfailing resource of the Holy Spirit who enables me to love others the way I have been loved by God. And -- are you kidding? -- I get to be part of a community of worship, service, and devotion that is headlong committed to healing the world. Can it get any better than that?

And there's more:

When Jesus is Lord of what counts, guess what? I don't have to anxiously chase another dollar, desperately seek another friend, ambitiously attempt to gain the whole world at the cost of my own soul.

Here's a rock-solid promise for each one of us today and every day:

"If we confess with our mouths that Jesus is Lord, and believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Romans 10:9

So, set aside our unbelief.

Settle your doubts and tell them to be quiet.

Pay attention to the prompting of the Holy Spirit within you.

Let the signs lead you, like the first believers, to the joyful confession: Jesus is Lord!