

Jesus Does Wonders
John 2:1-12
Isaiah 62:1-5

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John 2:1-12

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 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 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." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days.

Isaiah 62:1-5

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest,
until her vindication shines out like the dawn,
and her salvation like a burning torch.
The nations shall see your vindication,
and all the kings your glory;
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the Lord will give.
You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.
You shall no more be termed Forsaken,
and your land shall no more be termed Desolate;
but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her,
and your land Married;
for the Lord delights in you,
and your land shall be married.
For as a young man marries a young woman,
so shall your builder marry you,
and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride,
so shall your God rejoice over you.

This story in John is unique. Not only does it only appear in the Gospel of John, but it is one of the rare times that Jesus did a miracle that was not healing someone. He turns water into wine, so that the party can keep flowing.

Jesus has been baptized and he has started teaching in the synagogues. He has called some disciples, who are following him wherever he goes. He and his disciples attend a local wedding, where the host family runs out of wine.

This is not a minor *faux pas*: this is a fiasco of epic proportions. People will be talking about this catastrophe for years, making fun of the bridegroom's family. They will imply that no one can depend on this family for anything, if they can't even manage to have enough wine for a wedding feast. It could affect the bridegroom's business prospects. The disgrace could even affect his brothers' marriage prospects.

Jesus' mother was pregnant at her wedding. She knows what it is for people to try to make her ashamed on what she is told should be the happiest day of her life. She goes to the one person who can transform shame and she asks him to do something.¹

Well, she doesn't really ask him to do something. She tells him that their hosts are out of wine.

I don't know about you, but I know that, even today, if my mother pointed out a problem to me like that, one that I could solve, she would be expecting me to do something about it. She and my father raised me right; if I'm not solving the problem already, I must not have noticed it. Mary is trying to save the host family's dignity and their reputation, and she wants Jesus to work with her on this.

¹ Thanks to Teri Peterson for mentioning the (unattributed, alas) quote which I paraphrased here.

Jesus' response gets a lot of attention from people who read this Gospel. "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?"

First, "Woman." The word here, *gynae*, is not a disrespectful word.² This is not some movie cabbie yelling, "Lady, move your car!" This is the same word that Jesus uses to formally address any number of other women in the Gospels. A good translation might be "ma'am."

Jesus goes on to tell her that his time has not yet come – it's not time for him to be doing miracles.

Mary ignores his response. She tells the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them.

I hear some give-and-take here, maybe even some playfulness, in their dialogue. If that's the case, then Jesus knows he's going to do something. Mary knows he's going to do something. It's only a question of him being asked and what he's going to do.

Jesus does not sneak out to the local wine merchant, or even send his disciples to do it. He has the servants fill up large water containers, and he then turns that into wine. Not only wine, but about five barrels, one hundred and fifty gallons, of the best wine served that day!³

In most of Jesus' miracles, he is healing someone. He heals the blind, and the people see.⁴ He heals leprosy, and people's skin is cleared. He heals paralysis and illnesses, and people walk. He kicks demons out of people.⁵ He restores cut-off body parts.⁶ He even brings people back from the dead.⁷

² BibleWorks commentary: "[This word] is by no means disrespectful, but there is no generally accepted English equivalent for it, and it is best to omit the word in translation." Unfortunately, the NRSV translators did not heed this advice, so I must explain it.

³ Six containers, 20-30 gallons each = 120-180 gallons. One standard US wine barrel = 31 US gallons (27 CFR § 25.11.). That's a lot of wine!

⁴ Mark 8:22-26, John 9:1-12, etc.

⁵ Mark 16:9, Luke 8:2, Luke 13:31-32, Matthew 15:21-28, Mark 7:24-30, etc.

⁶ Luke 22: 47-53.

⁷ Mark 5: 21-43, Luke 7:11-17, John 11:1-44.

He does not do that this time. No human bodies or minds are healed in the making of this miracle.

When I looked at all of Jesus' miracles, though, I noticed something. With Jesus' healing miracles, restoring the person's mind or body is never the only thing he does, or even the main thing. He restores God's image in them. He restores them to their place in relationships and in the community. Healing their mind or their body is just a means to an end.

The man blind from birth whom Jesus healed during the Festival of Booths, for example, immediately got to enter the Temple for the first time.⁸ As a man who was not whole in all his parts, he would not have been allowed to enter the Temple,⁹ but now he could be what his family and community saw as a proper man. When Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law of illness, she immediately stood up and started fulfilling her social role as their hostess.¹⁰ When he healed Lazarus, he told the people to unbind Lazarus, and let him go.¹¹

Here at Cana, too, Jesus did a miracle, and the effect was more than restoring the community: it was to prevent a rift in the community. Instead of being, at worst, social outcasts, or, at best, the laughingstock of the entire Cana region for years to come, the host family will be remembered as good folks, who are generous with their hospitality.

Jesus did not do this miracle in front of everyone. He did not have the containers of water brought up on the dais near the wedding party and perform his miracle like a conjurer's trick. He could have. But no, that would have destroyed the beneficial effect he was trying to create here. He let the host family have all the credit for having such good wine on hand for the party. The

⁸ John 9: 1-12.

⁹ Leviticus 21.

¹⁰ Mark 1:29-34, Luke 4:38-39, Matthew 8:14-15.

¹¹ John 11:44

only people who knew about the miracle at the time were Jesus, his mother, his disciples, and the household servants.

John tells us later in the Gospel that he has told us about the signs, or miracles, that Jesus did, “so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing, you may have life in his name.”¹²

Our Winter sermon series is called Jesus 101, or “Who Is This Guy?” We are reading the Gospel stories about what Jesus did in his earthly ministry, to learn more about Jesus.

So, what does this story tell us about Jesus?

It tells us several things.

First and perhaps most obviously, it tells us that he has real power in the world. Jesus turned water into wine. This is just not something that normal human beings can do.

Secondly, Jesus uses that power unselfishly on behalf of human beings. Not just a few human beings, and not even just his followers. Jesus could have just kept filling his own wineglass, or kept the wine flowing for himself and his friends, but no, he makes enough wine for the whole party.

Jesus does this relatively anonymously. John may be telling us about the miracle to convince us that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, but that’s not why Jesus did it. He could have been the hero of the hour, the celebrity of the party, but, instead, he protects the dignity of the host family by doing this behind the scenes. He is preserving the community, and refusing to make this day about him.

¹² John 20:30-31.

Jesus does things abundantly. He could have created some wine, refilling a keg or two, and called it good. He would have accomplished at least the minimum of what his mother wanted him to do with a lot less fuss, muss, and bother. But no. Jesus does things in a big way. Five barrels of wine, a hundred and fifty gallons, is a huge amount of wine.

Jesus does things lavishly. He does not just create wine. He does not just create the cheap wine that everyone is expecting at this point in the party. He creates the best wine served that day.

So, what does this mean for us?

It means that when we trust Jesus' promises, like:

- That our sins are forgiven,
- that his grace is enough for us, and
- that he will walk with us, even in the valley of the shadow of death, and
- that whosoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life,

we know whose promises we're trusting. Someone who has the power to do what he says, who does what he says, and who does things lavishly. He does not just do the minimum we could expect. He does what he promises, and he does it in an abundant way.

It means something else, too.

We spoke last week about being a disciple, and what it means to be a disciple. It's more than being a fan. Jesus' disciples worked hard to become as much like their master as they could.

We are called to be Jesus' disciples.

That means that we need to use what power we have in this world, not just on behalf of ourselves, or our families, or the people who look like us, but on behalf of all the human beings around us. That power may be as simple as a kind word or as complicated as using position and influence to get someone the help that they need; use what you have.

That means that we must resist the temptation to make things about us. Most things really aren't. If Jesus can do a miracle anonymously to help people, then we can help someone without getting some kind of public credit. If you have done good for your neighbor, then I promise you that God knows about it, even if no one else does.

That means that we need to do things abundantly. Dream big! What would you do for the Kingdom of God, if you knew you could not fail? Let's see what we can make happen!

In this next week, remember the kind of Savior you have.

Look for opportunities to use the power you have to help those around you.

Don't make it about you; Jesus didn't.

And do things abundantly!

AMEN