

John 2:1-11

Epiphany 2, January 14, 2023
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On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. ⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

Jess and I were married almost eight years ago now, and I've got to be honest: I don't remember many of the wedding presents we received. If I go around the house, sometimes I'll take notice of something and remember that we had received it as a wedding present, although I'm not sure I always remember who it was from. Then there are other wedding presents that I *do* remember receiving *and* whom they were from that I also know we rarely use. But I have here today one simple, handmade gift that we received from Beth Kranz, and I've often said it's the best gift I received at our wedding. It's this little bowl holder/hot pad. You use it with bowls of leftovers that you've warmed up in the microwave. And it just fits so snugly around the bowl and so perfectly in my hand and allows me to hold a hot bowl of leftovers without burning my hand! And I use this gift ALL THE TIME.

It wasn't the most expensive gift we received, nor did I even really know what it was when I opened it. No matter, the best gifts aren't always necessarily the most expensive ones or even the ones you're most excited about when you open them. The *best* gifts are the ones you get to use again and again, even every day. Well, in our text today, Jesus attends a wedding, and Jesus gives a gift. It was the very best gift given on that day. And even though this wasn't your wedding, it was a gift for you too.

Jesus Gives the Best Wedding Gift

The wedding was at Cana, a small Galilean town about 4-6 miles from Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. Jesus was invited as a wedding guest together with six friends—six of what would eventually be twelve disciples—that had only that week started following Jesus. These six were James and John, Peter and Andrew, Philip and Nathanael. And Mary was also there, but not as a wedding *guest*. It would *appear* that this was the wedding of a close relative, as it was customary in those days for the older female relatives to help host the reception, which is what it *seems* that Mary is doing here. And having the behind-the-scenes view of the festivities, Mary realizes that they've run out of wine.

So, Mary goes to Jesus with this problem, as she'd learned by *this* point that when there was a problem, her Son Jesus could solve it. And solve it He did! He had the servants fill six stone water jars with water, and then draw some water out and take it to the master of ceremonies. ***"When the***

master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, ‘Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.’”

It was a miracle, in fact the very *first* of Jesus’ miracles. A wedding feast had run out of wine, and Jesus saw to it that the happy couple wouldn’t be embarrassed by the lack of supplies. In fact, He turned somewhere in the neighborhood of 150 gallons of water into wine. And not just any regular, run-of-the-mill wine, this was the *best* wine. What a gift! That’s the best wedding gift ever, right?

Not exactly. That wasn’t the *real* gift that Jesus gave. Notice, no one knew where the wine had come from besides the servants and Jesus’ disciples. No doubt, Jesus did not receive a thank you card in the mail for providing the best wine ever for the wedding feast, since the bride and groom were none-the-wiser about its source. No, Jesus did this thing in private. He didn’t make a big deal about turning water into wine, because the wine *wasn’t* the big deal of the day.

So, what *was* the big deal? What should be our main focus in this miracle account? I’ve heard and read a number of different ideas about this text, where pastors and authors have all sorts of different focuses—some good, some bad. Some pastors might use this as a wedding text, Jesus’ presence at the wedding and blessing of the wedding couple with the wine being an approval of the institution of marriage. Others might focus on the supposed insignificance of the miracle to show Christ’s concern for even our smallest needs. That was one of my focuses in a Lutheran Spokesman devotion on this text from a year ago. And both those ideas have merit, but they’re not the *big* focus of this miracle.

Then there are the not-so-good ideas presented, such as that this text “proves” that Mary is our intercessor with God, as she prompts Jesus’ first miracle. The thought being that if you want Jesus to do something for you, just pray to Mary and she’ll walk up to Jesus in heaven and make sure the job is done. Or another idea that I read from a Calvinist was that this text proves that God *doesn’t* want everyone to be saved, since Jesus made wine, and anyone who drank that wine was automatically condemned to hell. It was a test, and many failed—that was *that* author’s claim anyways. I read another take, that this showed Jesus’ humanity, and not in a good way. He was a grown man, and He was tired of His meddlesome mother’s constant nagging, so He dismisses her rudely. And *we* can dismiss all of *these* ideas straightaway, since not only are they not the focus of the text, they’re not even *found* in this miracle account or anywhere else in Scripture, for that matter.

So, what *was* the big deal of the day? What was the *real* gift? We don’t have to get cute with our explanation, because John comes right out and identifies the *real* focus at the end of our text: ***“This the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”*** The big deal is that this miracle revealed who Jesus was. The big deal was that His disciples saw and believed. *That* was the big deal. And *that* was the real gift given at this wedding.

Notice, John doesn’t use the word “miracle,” he calls this the first of Jesus’ “signs.” That’s the word John always uses in his gospel to describe Jesus’ miracles, because they *are* signs doing what signs always do: they point us to something. Specifically, Jesus’ sign of turning water into wine points the disciples and us to Jesus. It’s a sign pointing out who Jesus was. This was what His signs always did.

So, Jesus did this, the first of His signs, *so that* His disciples would believe. And the Holy Spirit saw to it that the Apostle John recorded this down so that *you* could read it, and so that *you* would believe. This is what John says at the end of his book: ***“Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”*** (Jn. 20:30f)

So, we see that the big deal, the real focus is much greater than a wedding feast or a happy couple or a substantial amount of wine for a wedding reception. The real focus and the real gift is *Jesus*, the Son of God in the flesh, doing His work of saving sinners through faith in Him. He did this so that *we* would believe, so that *we* could be saved. And we can see that this much bigger picture is Jesus’ focus when we listen in on Jesus’ conversation with His mother.

It strikes us as a bit rude at first, Jesus’ way of addressing his mother. I don’t think it would have gone over too well in *my* house growing up if I went around calling my mom “woman.” But Jesus isn’t being rude or unloving or disrespectful with that way of addressing His mother. In fact, there was another time when Jesus called Mary “woman.” That came three years later on the cross. ***“When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, ‘Woman, behold, your son!’ Then he said to the disciple, ‘Behold, your mother!’ And from that hour the disciple took her to his own home.”*** (John 19:26-27) There—with the literal weight of the world bearing down upon His shoulders, body held up by nails through His flesh—Jesus still showed His perfect love and respect for His mother, even as He called her “woman.”

So, rather than getting hung up on that part of the conversation, let’s read on, because what follows is much more important. ***“Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.”*** That’s another strange thing to say: ***“My hour has not yet come.”*** And yet, that same phrase pops up another few times in this book, such as on an occasion when Jesus was preaching in the temple with understanding that astonished the people. He made open claims that He was the Christ from God, and many people were upset with Him over this, but John writes, ***“They were seeking to arrest Him, but no one laid a hand on Him, because His hour had not yet come.”*** (John 7:30) That was in John chapter 7, and in chapter 8 Jesus was teaching in the temple again, referring to Himself as the Light of the World who had been sent to earth by His Father, and the Pharisees spoke out against Him. ***“But,”*** John writes, ***“No one arrested Him, because His hour had not yet come.”*** (John 8:20) Are you starting to get what “hour” Jesus is referring to as having ***“not yet come”***?

This all changed on the night when Jesus was betrayed. As He sat at the Passover Feast with His disciples, ***“He lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You.”*** (John 17:1) The hour that Jesus had been looking forward to at the wedding in discussion with His mother was the hour when He would be glorified—that is, lifted up on a cross of wood and crucified upon it. Dying for your sins, in your place, that was Jesus’ glory. He went on in that prayer, ***“Glorify Your Son that the Son may glorify You, since you have given Him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given Him.”*** (John 17:1b-2)

So again, we see that the real gift that Jesus had given at that family wedding in Cana was the gift of faith to the disciples, the gift of eternal life. He used this quiet miracle to reveal His ***“glory as of the***

only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14) And He’s revealed this glory to each of us as well, not through miracles which we can see, but through another gift that’s even more effective. I’ve got mine right here. My Bible—this one is my very first Bible. This was a gift given to me by my parents on Christmas Day 1997. And this was a very good gift. And you’ve been given the same gift too, so that *you* can believe, so that God’s glory might be revealed to you. So that you might know that your sins were taken upon His shoulders and destroyed forever upon the cross.

And He’s given you the gift of His Word so that you can see in the face of Jesus what God is really like: **“Full of grace and truth.”** He has declared to you this truth—the truth that your sins, though many, are completely forgiven. The *truth* is what John declared later in this gospel: **“When Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.”** (John 13:1) *You* are His very own in this world, and He loved *you* to the very end. And in this truth God reveals His grace. Though we could not deserve it and are often terribly weighed down by our guilt and unworthiness, *still* Jesus loved us to the end. *Still*, Jesus kept His focus on *you* having **“life in His name.”**

And in His grace, He’s given us still other gifts. I’ve brought some with me here today. They’re mementos. One says, “This certifies that Matthew David Rodebaugh, child of Samuel Rodebaugh and Jessica Rodebaugh, Date of birth October 3, 2017, was baptized in Winter Haven, FL on the 8th day of October in the year of our Lord 2017, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Immanuel Lutheran Church, Pastor Samuel Rodebaugh.” And the other is exactly like it yet bearing the name “Levi Andrew Rodebaugh” instead. We have two others like them, one dated November 17, 2019, and another dated April 3, 2022. Those were emotional days for me as I baptized my four sons. And despite my blubbering, my sons were given the gift that when I dipped my hand in the water and poured it on their heads in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, they were made children of God *right then*. Each was given salvation. As a gift to them those three days, Jesus scooped them up in His loving arms full of grace and truth, to give them His forgiveness. What a precious gift, one that you’ve been given too.

And these are gifts that you can use *every day*, making them the best sorts of gifts! When troubles afflict you, you can turn to that Word and remember Jesus who did not consider the embarrassment of a bride and groom as too trivial for His care, but instead provided for them. And since He has invited you to do so, you too can go to Him like Mary did, and He will help. When your heart condemns you, you can turn to that Word day-by-day and read and remember that when the Son of God declared **“It is finished,”** upon the cross, He was speaking of your sin and all that was needed to wipe it forever from God’s record book. Not only that, but you can remember your baptism, and remember the promise that **“we were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”** (Romans 6:4)

These are the gifts, the very best gifts that Jesus has given you. They’re no different than that wedding gift Jesus gave to His disciples with the water-become-wine. All of these were given by Him, **“so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”** Thanks be to God, in Jesus’ name. Amen.