

January 17, 2010
John 2: 1-11
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Weddings are magical things. For the most part they are one of the happiest events of our lives. The planning may not have been so happy, but the day itself usually finds everyone at their best. For the couple being married the ceremony itself may be a bit foggy. They may not remember exactly what they said or how they got through it but they know they are the happiest they have ever been up to that point of their lives. They are wearing the best, most expensive clothing they will ever wear. They have polished and cleaned themselves up the best they will ever be cleaned. The hair is perfect, the shoes are shined, everyone is looking their best and the party is just beginning. The party usually goes into the night and sometimes early hours of morning. In rural Saskatchewan, it often continues the next day with a gathering to open gifts and eat the left over's from the often home-made meal and midnight snack from the night before.

In Jesus time a wedding was the coming together of two families in a business transaction. It was bigger than the couple and here is how it went based on information we have.

The wedding of two Jewish people began on Tuesday night with the groom and his friends heading over to the brides house swinging oil lamps and causing a ruckus along the way. Good clean guy fun. Once at the brides house, she would come out in front of them and she would remove her veil to show them how beautiful she really is. This would be the first time the groom and groomsmen would see her without any obstruction, without her veil. The men would then return to the groom's house again swinging their lamps and upon arriving back at his home start what would be a seven day party. That's right, seven days of celebration, drinking and eating. During these seven days family and friends would come with gifts, food, well wishes and the host would supply the wine. Lots and lots of wine!

It was tradition to start with the best wines and save the cheaper stuff until later in the celebration probably closer to the end of the week when everyone had had so much they would not notice the cheap stuff. Serve the best to get the party going.

And so it was at one of these celebrations that we see Jesus, his mother and the disciples. We don't know how many days they had been there joining in the celebration but we do know that the wine is running out and the host is beginning to panic. Perhaps it is only day 5. It is said that the wedding is that of a relative of Mary's and because of her connection it has come to the attention of Jesus' mother that it is too soon for the celebration to be without wine and such a social faux pas must be avoided and she knows the one person in the crowd who can save the day. There is no local liquor store to send her son to, no local winery to call to truck in more wine; no this would take something special and her son was the man to do it.

Don't you find it odd that this would be the time and the place for Mary to push her son into doing something she knows he can do but has not done, at least publicly, before? How does she know he can help?

Right about now some of you and certainly other Christians in other denominations might be saying what is Jesus doing at the party anyway? Shouldn't he be back in the city fighting the Romans, dealing with the social problems, healing the sick, lifting up the poor? We shouldn't be depicting a Jesus who went to parties and supplied wine to a group of already wine-filled revellers. This is no way for someone like Jesus to act!

Why is it important that he do this? What is it to prove in this unlikely place? And in fact, once it is done no one but the servers and the disciples know anyway. So what is it about this story of changing water into wine that has such significance then and now?

Once again, we are back to the wisdom of our gospel writers to bring the message of God to the people through story in a way that their readers and hearers will understand. The people they were writing to would know first-hand about these week long celebrations. They would know the importance of the wine at the celebration therefore understanding the importance of the miracle. We on the other hand don't immediately go there. Although some like their wine, it is not central to our lifestyle. For most in our churches today studying the importance of this miracle wine may not have the same significance immediately. In fact today some would say shame on them for drinking so much.

The size of the containers themselves prove they were drinking too much. Six containers each holding 30 gallons, excessive by anyone's standards isn't it? Enough wine for days of partying, for the whole town and Jesus wants them filled to the brim. Not just a little bit but a whole lot. The jugs they were to fill were purification jugs used during the purification rituals of Jewish custom to fulfill their laws. These jugs normally held the water used to cleanse the body to make it pure again and now they were filled with gallons of wine. Are you starting to see the message here; the significance of these jugs of water, the significance of the wine and the amount that was produced and the vessels that held it? Nothing in the stories of Jesus are without double meaning.

Wine in Jesus time was a sign of abundance, wealth, a place on the social ladder. It wasn't about getting drunk, it was about showing your ability to provide abundance and to share that abundance with others. And this is where the miracle of changing water into wine becomes an important sign in Jesus' ministry and his mother knows it. Remember she has a part in this too. She has been aware since before his birth when the angel came to visit, that her son would reveal his true gifts one day; and today was the day to start. A day of celebration, a day to bring joy and abundance to a gathered group of his own people.

It also means this, the jugs of water usually used in purification were in keeping with the old laws of which there were many. By filling them to the brim with wine Jesus is making a statement that says that this God in their presence was there to show them that life

should be more joyous than this life of rules and regulations. Our story today tells of the joy that God brings in abundance. It joins the religious and the secular in a new way of marrying together, a new way of being.

When Jesus changes the water into wine he is effectively saying “what I bring is to be celebrated, God wants you to be full of life and laughter. God wants you to have abundance and joy and God will give you abundance and joy!” And it is here that the Bible says that “Jesus performed this first of his signs at Cana in Galilee; in this way he revealed his glory, and the disciples believed in him”. It is from here that the disciples and Jesus move forward into their ministry together with a new understanding of each other and with a new understanding of the grace of God. The disciples now believed in the abundance of God, in the power of God, in the grace and joy of God and in the work they would set out to do. They could not comprehend the things they would witness in the future but they knew it would represent the abundance given by God.

One point we have not covered yet is the fact that very few people at the wedding notice what has happened and this may just be the main point for us today. Is it possible that we miss the gift of grace and joy because we are too occupied by other things? Are we too busy being bored in this fascinating world of ours? Do we miss the joy of a house full of children? Do we miss the joy of having a good job by dreading going to work? Do we eat our food and not notice how good it tastes or how lucky we are to have it? What exactly do we miss in our busy day?

Turning the water into wine revealed God’s presence at the party; in the midst of the joy of good food, good friends, laughter and conversation God is there. Every once in a while we catch a glimpse of God at the party in those moments when you have a glimmer of recognition that life is good. The glory of God is seen in the people we love and who love us back and the places we call home. Once we recognize that God is always with us then we will see God in the mundane places, in the common everyday places where the common water becomes the best of wines and we celebrate.

Amen