

Jonas Mark Hayes
First Presbyterian Church of Greenville
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Texts: John 2:1-11

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.

- John 2:1-11

The gospel of John calls attention to that fact that this was Jesus' first miracle: *turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana*. One contrast between John's gospel and the other three is that John is highly selective in the narratives about Jesus he chooses to include. He narrates only seven miracle stories, far fewer than in any of the synoptics. The selection of this story as the very first significant thing Jesus does when embarking on his ministry suggests that it should carry considerable significance.¹

What could be significant about turning water into wine at a wedding?

This sounds more like a luxury than meeting the genuine, (more important) human needs in the community. Perhaps it would be more appropriate for Jesus' first miracle to be a healing of the sick or seriously disabled – or perhaps the feeding of the hungry crowd.

¹ *The Lectionary Commentary: Theological Exegesis for Sunday Texts. Third Readings: The Gospels*. Ed. By E. Van Harn. (Continuum: Eerdmans Publishing Co.), p. 489.

We learn after reading this text that the family (celebrating the wedding) is not poor: they have servants (v. 5) and expensive stone jars (v.6).

Most of the miracles in John's Gospel have an explicit interpretation attached to them, but this one does not.

That is just like the gospel-writer John. He likes to puzzle, to tease, to provoke his readers into thinking about what he writes.² John does not spell everything out for us, no... he leaves us to do the work... of interpretation... for ourselves!

We may choose to simply read this story... hearing its surface meaning... and leave it at that. Like good Christians, we may remember the story from Sunday school. We may be able to tell the story, and retell it. Yet – knowing the story in the bible... and being able to tell it... that does not ensure that we hear God's word to us through this story each time we read it.

When reading the Bible, we can learn from asking honest questions... sometimes the most basic ones are the best... and then open ourselves to what God might be saying to us that might be new to us... something that is healing... something that perhaps your heart and mind might be yearning for... or perhaps it might be simply that subtle reminder of God's grace that we can always stand to hear once again...

First – let's ask: *when? When did this miracle happen?*

It happened at a wedding. Jesus was perfectly home at such an occasion.³ It was a time of celebration. He wanted to be there... with his family... his loved ones... Jesus was not too serious... he was not gloom and doom, nor was he a killjoy. There are some religious people who shed gloom wherever they go. They are suspicious of joy and happiness. The reality of sin in the world outweighs their grasp of God's grace.

Jesus knew how to celebrate! – and he calls us to celebrate our lives, as part of the body or Christ.

One of my favorite roles of the pastor... and there are many... is the role of the "celebrant." The root word for the "celebrant" is celebrate. It is an important part of the pastoral role to be one who celebrates... and who gives testimony... who points to the one who calls us to celebrate the gift of life, which God blesses us with.

² *The Lectionary Commentary: Theological Exegesis for Sunday Texts. Third Readings: The Gospels.* Ed. By E. Van Harn. (Continuum: Eerdmans Publishing Co.), p. 490.

³ *The Gospel of John.* Volume 1. William Barclay. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), p. 99.

Christ is the true celebrant! He is the one who teaches us how to celebrate. In fact, in his most famous sermon – *The Sermon on the Mountain* – Jesus offers us insight into celebration... simple phrases, beatitudes that help us to live a life of celebration... a life that embraces true, authentic relationship with God and one another. Most of us are most familiar with those beatitudes beginning with the words: “Blessed are those...” (that is the way it reads in the RSV and King James), yet a more accurate interpretation of the Greek would read: “Happy are those...” *Happy are the meek for they shall inherit the earth. Happy are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Happy are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

Now for the next question... Next – let’s ask: *where? Where did this happen?*

This miracle occurred in a humble village in Galilee. It was not wrought with a Hollywood background... with all the bells and whistles... the perfect lighting... and surround sound to boot, no... it did not occur among a vast crowd to get everyone’s attention; it was wrought in a home (just like yours and mine). One of my favorite things about the gospels is that – in many cases – Jesus does the extraordinary work of God in the most ordinary of circumstances... in the most ordinary places, such as the home. Jesus’ actions at Cana of Galilee shows what he thinks of a home. The scripture lesson says: “Jesus... revealed his glory” and that revelation took place within a home.⁴

The scholar William Barclay talks about the strange paradox in attitude of many people to the place they call home. “They would admit at once that there is no more precious place in the world; and yet, at the same time, they would also have to admit that in it they claim the right to be far more discourteous, far more boorish, far more selfish, far more impolite than they would dare to be in any society of strangers.”⁵ We are called by God... to remember... it was in a humble home that Jesus revealed his glory. “To him home was a place for which nothing but his best was good enough.”⁶

For the last question, let’s ask: *Why? Why did this miracle happen?*

As one seeks to answer the complex question “Why?” – one cannot become too tied to one particular answer. There is most certainly an array of answers to the question “Why?” that can all be meaningful... and shed light on this text.

I personally believe that there are infinitely more meanings to each scripture text than their authors even intended. This is one reason why I never get bored with scripture: thousands upon thousands of sermons can be preached on the same scripture passage...

⁴ *The Gospel of John*. Volume 1. William Barclay. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), p. 100.

⁵ *The Gospel of John*. Volume 1. William Barclay. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), p. 101.

⁶ *The Gospel of John*. Volume 1. William Barclay. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), p. 101.

and they could all be very different. The insight and learning that we gain from scripture is infinite... and there is so much depth in these ancient words... It is surely important to study the author's intention... and the scholarship... behind scripture... and yet, we are not to withhold our imaginations... God created us, and so God knows that God's word to speak to us differently... that is the complexity and the beauty behind it.

One reason why I believe that this miracle happened is...

Jesus wanted to provide... he wants to provide us... with the simple... ordinary... pleasures of life... A life in the spirit awakens our senses to an awareness of God's grace... It is a practice of mindfulness... Jesus is enacting in this miracle what he later in this gospel says: "I am come that they might have life, and live it abundantly..." (John 10:10)

How can we process mindfulness... enjoying the simple, ordinary pleasures of life... living our lives "abundantly" in the spirit... in a week where we are consumed (overwhelmed) by the devastation in Haiti?... Each day we turn on the television we see horrifying images... and the death toll keeps climbing... What possibly could the story of Jesus' turning water into wine have to say to us?

It is imperative that we look at the context of this story in the whole of scripture.

There are inspirational passages in scripture... stories that move us... and then, there are those passages that are horrific... that make us sick to our stomach... There are passages that appall us; when we read stories of pain and suffering and injustice, we should be appalled...

There are stories of plagues that kill thousands of people... wars that devastate nations... illnesses that stifle individuals with no hope of getting better... Not only can you find these stories in the Old Testament (where many of us would expect to find them), we can also find these difficult stories in the New Testament. Even the Christmas story (one of the most joyous stories in the gospels) comes in the context of King Herod's command to kill every child below a certain age... and he did this out of fear... that his throne would be succeeded by the Christ child... This is appalling behavior... and as readers of the bible, we are all witnesses to it.

We read the whole of scripture... the inspirational passages and the appalling ones... then comes along this quirky little story of Jesus turning water into wine... at a wedding...

A subtle thing we may notice about this text... is that John does not call this event in the life of Jesus' ministry a miracle... he calls it "a sign". The scripture says: "Jesus did this, the first of his *signs*..." What we might call miracles, John calls signs.

Signs of what?

The signs we witness in scripture... the signs revealed to us in our own lives are really "signs of the covenant" – signs that we are in relationship with a loving God who calls us by name.

At times when fear runs rampant... and when devastation is a reality for many... it can be difficult, seemingly impossible to see signs of the covenant... (the lands that seem hopeless in the world – they remind us also of the hopeless lands that lie within ourselves, our own spiritual landscape... There are times of grief when)... "we squint through a fog... peer through the mist." (1 Cor 13, The Message) We strain our eyes... and even then it can be difficult to see "the grace upon grace" that Christ talks about.

In the midst of this gem of a story, I find it interesting how the true celebrant (Christ) responds to his mother, Mary's statement. The scripture says: "When the wine gave out, (Mary) said to him, "They have no wine." What does he say, but: "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? *My hour has not yet come.*" ***My hour has not come.*** What does this mean? I think it means that his hour – his hour of death will come – *but it hasn't come yet.* In a moment of joy and celebration, Jesus holds an understanding of the reality of death... to which he does not hold a blind eye.

The hour has come for many in Haiti this week... and we must pray unceasingly... we must give our resources and energy to healing and wholeness for their nation... for our nation and others... because all nations are broken and have needs that are immense...

May we keep our eyes open to these signs of the covenant... and not gloss over them... May we celebrate our lives in the small ways, like the wedding at Cana, for... *Our hour will come*... like it did for Christ... as it did for many in Haiti this week, but our hour has not come yet... We are called to recognize signs of the covenant, but now – more importantly – we must be signs of the covenant for the people of Haiti. Donate to the Red Cross, Save the Children, or the Presbyterian Disaster Relief... do anything in your power you are able to do... for "When one person suffers, all suffer with him." Also, it is important for us to know that because the Presbyterian Church (USA)... because *you* gave... to the One Great Hour of Sharing Offering last year... money and resources were immediately available... the Presbyterian Church (USA) immediately responded... first on the scene! The road to recovery for Haiti will be long, but it is good to know that PC USA is already there... a kind of miracle or sign of God's grace even now.

Christ will work through elements that seem to us – ordinary... Christ will work through flesh and blood, yours and mine.

O God, may we be signs of the covenant to the people of Haiti... and all people... for we are desperate for your presence, your kindness, your peace.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.