

Jesus Rescues a Party

John 1:1-11

5/6/18

I've presided at a lot of weddings over my years of ministry- large, formal weddings with hundreds of people in attendance, small informal affairs with just me, the bride and groom, and a witness or two. Military weddings on base, outdoor weddings in brutal heat or heavy rain.

Weddings for very young first-timers, as well as weddings for seniors who found love again. And I've got stories. Stories of rings bouncing down the aisle, children taking over the service, wedding party members who took the word "party" too literally, a groom who was so nervous he couldn't repeat his vows, and a father of the bride who sobbed loudly and uncontrollably as he walked his daughter down the aisle. Weddings, regardless of size or style, are intense, emotionally-laden affairs, as well as joyful times! And, the way they are designed and implemented reflects on the couple and the families involved.

And that leads us to John's gospel, where we find Jesus and his newly-chosen disciples at a wedding.

*On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup>Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup>When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." <sup>4</sup>And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." <sup>5</sup>His mother said to the*

*servants, "Do whatever he tells you." <sup>6</sup>Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup>He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. <sup>9</sup>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 <sup>10</sup>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." <sup>11</sup>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)*

Weddings in those days were governed by Jewish law and local custom. They were held on a Wednesday, usually in the evening, and then the celebration would continue for several days, hosted by the groom's family. Since hospitality was regarded as one of the highest values in the Middle-East, a family was judged by the level of their hospitality on an occasion such as this. Running out of wine was a major breach of hospitality, and would have resulted in shame that would have stained this family and the young couple for years. Jesus' mother was right to be concerned about this. And, if other sources are to be believed, she was

related to the groom's family, and probably had a role in hosting this wedding.

But Jesus' response to her seems pretty harsh, doesn't it? After she tells him the wine has run out, here is what he says: <sup>4</sup>*And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."* (John 2:4) Now, I know what you're thinking, "'Woman?' Really?" This is one of those situations in which the literal translation doesn't give the real sense of the words. Calling her "Woman," sounds disrespectful and maybe even like a rebuke to us. But Jesus uses the same form of address when he is hanging on the cross, and he tenderly says to her and the disciple standing next to her, "Woman, here is your son." And to the disciple, "Here is your mother." (John 19:26,27) Addressing her as "woman" may sound odd to us, but it carried no negative connotation at that time.

But what about the rest of the phrase? *"What concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."* Commentators have wrestled with the meaning of this phrase. I think it's best to start with the end and work back. Jesus says that his hour has not yet come. In John's gospel, Jesus' "hour" always refers to the cross. At this point, Jesus is on the brink of launching his public ministry. He has called a few disciples, and is getting ready to go! I think he understands that performing his first public miracle

will begin the countdown to the cross. He alone, with the Father's guidance, will decide when that will be. Not even his mother can make that decision.

Mary seems to concede the point, and simply tells the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them to do. That's often when good things happen, isn't it? When we do what Jesus says to do! Then the fun begins!

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Let's talk about these jars for a minute. Something like these jars would have been found near the entry to every Jewish home. They would have served two purposes. First, water would have been taken from them to wash the feet of people who came in off the dusty streets as they entered the house. Second, water would have been drawn from them to wash the hands of everyone before they ate and between courses during the meal. The exact manner and timing of the washing was all proscribed by Jewish law, and was followed meticulously by good Jews.

Next, note how much water the jars held. I've placed a 30-gallon trash can up here so you can get an idea of how much water was contained in each of these jars. Some of you were wondering about that, weren't you?

This was a mammoth amount of water! What happened next is just plain fun!

<sup>8</sup>He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. <sup>9</sup>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 <sup>10</sup>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.”

(John 2:7-10) Jesus not only bails out this poor family, but he does it with style and class and great abundance! The wedding guests didn't even know that the wine had run out! What a wonderful story!

And the conclusion to the story helps us see a couple more important things about the purpose of what Jesus did. <sup>11</sup>Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. (John 2:11)

John refers to this miracle as the first of Jesus' signs. Miracles are always called “signs” in John's gospel, and the gospel only describes about a half dozen of them. A sign is something that points to something else. So often these miracles or “signs” in John's gospel point to an important truth about Jesus and they are usually followed by teaching about that truth. This time, however, the sign of turning the water into wine stands on

its own. What does this sign reveal about Jesus, about the Word made flesh?

First, it shows us that Jesus was not a harsh, hermit-like, stick-in-the-mud, always-serious kind of guy! Jesus enjoyed going to parties! In fact, we'll see him at these kinds of occasions many times, and he is even criticized for doing so too often! The fact that people kept inviting him to parties, suggests to me that he was a good guest at these events! Jesus liked to have a good time! Does that surprise you? Keep on reading John!

The story also demonstrates his compassion, even for folks caught in an embarrassing situation like this one. As a real human being, Jesus understands what that's like and wanted to help. The story also demonstrates that Jesus has power over the natural order of things. He can turn ordinary water into wine! Later, he'll multiply a few loaves and fish to feed 5,000 people and he'll calm a storm. He's a real human being all right, but he still possesses godly powers. As John wrote in chapter 1, "*And the Word became flesh and lived among us and we have seen his glory...*" (John 1:14a) These new disciples of Jesus have now seen something of Jesus' glory, his creative power, and John tells us that they believed; they put their faith and trust in him.

All of this, though remarkable, is fairly straightforward, but remember that Lou reminded us last week that John often operates on two tracks.

There is the main story, but other things are going on at the same time. There is at least one other thing going on in our story on a parallel track. Remember the six stone jars? They were for Jewish rites of purification. But Jesus takes them and uses them for a whole other purpose. That meant that they could no longer be used for their original intent, could they? They were full of wine! Through the next couple chapters, Jesus is seen to be setting aside, critiquing, or transforming Jewish practices, laws, and institutions. Jesus clearly believed that some of these things were no longer helping people get closer to God; In fact they were now getting in the way. In this case, Jesus is going to make it clear that purification is not about outward ceremonies involving things like washing the hands; it is about purification of the heart, which only God can bring about.

In a few minutes we are going to celebrate the way in which God brought about the cleansing of our hearts, as we celebrate the Lord's Supper, which interestingly, uses the symbol of wine! As we celebrate the Supper, I encourage you to thank God for how Jesus has made our hearts clean, so we don't have to keep trying (and failing) to earn God's forgiveness. And for the fact that we serve a Savior who has compassion, who enjoys a good time, and understands and cares about our daily lives. A Savior who wants us to know him, and who invites us to come to the Table so we can better know him through this sacrament.