

## **When You Run Out of Wine**

January 20, 2013

John 2:1-11

I've performed a lot of weddings over my years in ministry, and I've attended many others. I'm sure most of you have attended many as well. Christian weddings tend to be fairly similar in terms of the basics.

Oh, there may be different music used, different songs sung, the dress, the decor, even the wording may vary to some extent, but the same basic elements are always there.

Maybe you didn't realize this, but under our laws here, the only things required to make a marriage legal are a public declaration before at least two witnesses and a pronouncement by someone legally authorized to do so - either a minister or certain public officials.

In fact, you can perform a legal marriage with just five words - take him, take her, taken! Of course, most of ours are considerably more wordy than that.

But now, if you get away from our ways, things can be considerably different. I recall a Palestinian Muslim wedding. I had never quite experienced anything like that.

So much of it was completely alien to me. Customs and traditions I had never encountered before, and like all Middle Eastern weddings it went on for ages. It was like I had entered a different world.

And to some extent that is what we need to do as we try to understand the story of the wedding at Cana that today's gospel lesson talks about, as we try to place ourselves in a different time, in a different culture with different traditions from our own.

And as we follow the story I would like to focus on different characters as they each get a glimpse of who Jesus really is. We will consider how they respond and how we might respond too.

So let us begin by reflecting on Mary's part in the story.

In the Middle East in Jesus' day, weddings tended to be affairs for family and close friends only, so it is highly likely that Mary was a relative of the family hosting this wedding.

And probably through his mother, Jesus is also invited along with his disciples to Cana, a short journey north of Nazareth, Jesus home town.

So Mary notices at some point that the wine had run out. Now, wine running out at a wedding in Jewish culture was not just a minor mishap, that could be rectified by sending someone down to Harris-Teeter for a couple of extra bottles. It was a major disaster, bringing shame and dishonor to the host family.

And yet Jesus' reply in v.4, "That's not our problem, my time has not yet come.", is surprising if not seeming to be very rude at first, although it is thought that how this was understood depended upon what tone of voice was used. But whether it was rude or not, it was still the answer, "No!"

Did this put Mary off? Absolutely not! Mary was not giving up, she told the servants, "Do whatever He tells you."

Although at this point Jesus had performed no miracles, Mary seemed to recognize something in her Son to put her complete trust in him, that he would do the right thing.

As a mother she knew her son probably better than anyone, and yet there was something about Jesus still to be revealed to her.

And Jesus does as his mother asks. He tells the servants to fill up the stone jars with water, which would be set aside for ritual washing. And the water turned into wine as it was served.

Mary trusted her Son completely, even though she did not know what he would do. And Jesus did not disappoint her, as Mary glimpsed for the first time the power of God working through Jesus.

Maybe there are times when we cannot see what is ahead of us; we are in the midst of circumstances we cannot understand. We know God is with us, but we are afraid to trust him completely.

There is a story about a house that caught fire one night and a young boy was forced to climb on to the roof to escape. His father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, "Jump! I'll catch you." He knew the boy had to jump to save his life. All the boy could see, however, was flames, smoke, and blackness.

As you can imagine, he was afraid to leave the roof, but his father kept yelling: "Jump! I will catch you." But the boy shouted back, "Daddy, I can't see you." Then the father replied, "But I can see you and that's all that matters."

And that is all that matters, that when we cannot see what is in front of us, and we do not understand what is happening, we must never lose sight of the fact that God knows, and that is what matters.

Mary has much to teach us in these times and situations We need to learn to trust the Lord completely. Even though we may have had faith in Jesus for many years, situations will arise that will test that trust to the limit.

But, he will not fail us. He knows about every situation and trial that we face. And he has promised to be with us.

Now let us turn to the man in charge of the feast.

Every wedding in Jesus time would have had a wine steward or master of ceremonies, someone who would be in charge of the food and drink. And it was to this man that the servants took a sample of the water from the stone jars, which turned to wine as it was served.

John tells us that although the servants knew exactly what had happened, the man in charge of the feast did not, but he knew enough about wine, to know good wine when he tasted it.

Now we don't know how much this man knew about Jesus. Probably very little, if anything at all, but he recognized that something extraordinary had taken place.

He called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone else serves the best wine first, and after the guests have had plenty to drink, he serves the ordinary wine. But you have kept the best wine until now!"

There are many people today, many people in churches, who are like the wine steward. They may know of Jesus, certainly they know what they've read and been told, but they may not really have experienced very much of Jesus, of what commitment to him can bring to life. Maybe some of you feel that way this morning.

Yet, you recognize that there is something special about Jesus. You know that there is something about him; about his life, about his teachings that you admire. You have a desire to know more about Him.

Well, I think the gospel writer includes this story in his narrative to help us understand who Jesus is. It is this first miracle or sign as John calls it that begins to reveal Jesus to us.

Signs are things which point to something beyond themselves. And this sign is here to show us that Jesus has the anointing and power of God and to encourage us to put our trust in him.

Now we don't know if the wine steward decided to find out more about Jesus after he witnessed this miracle.

But let me encourage you today to do just that, whether you maybe start reading a gospel for yourself and take a closer look at Jesus' life or maybe join us in our Bible study. There are many different ways of finding out more.

So John's purpose is not just to show us that Jesus was able to turn water into wine, but that we will search beyond the miracles that we might believe that He is chosen and anointed by God, and put our faith in Him.

And lastly let's look at the disciples' part in the story.

The disciples had only recently begun to follow Jesus, and according to the accounts that we have it was only two days before the wedding at Cana that Jesus called Philip and Nathaniel to follow him.

So I believe that the disciples must have understood something about who Jesus was, enough to leave their families and livelihood's to follow Him.

As I have pointed out in our Bible studies, the gospels don't give us every little detail of what went on in Jesus' life and ministry. I'm sure there is a lot that happened that isn't recorded. John even says that at the end of his gospel.

And it certainly seems reasonable to me that these disciples wouldn't have just dropped everything to follow a total stranger.

So no doubt they had heard about, and probably had even met or encountered Jesus. Yet they had not witnessed any of the very special events that were to follow Jesus' ministry.

So I am sure that even to the disciples, this experience at Cana was still a great surprise.

And I wonder what expectations the disciples had. We talked last Sunday about how expectations often determine what we see. The disciples had all decided to follow Jesus. Maybe they expected to be preaching straight away, or going to Jerusalem for Jesus to be crowned King.

But their first mission together was coming to this wedding. What could they possibly learn from a wedding?

John tells us that through this wedding miracle, Jesus "revealed his glory, and His disciples believed in him." They already believed in Jesus, but their faith in him had grown and been strengthened.

There was a film that came out some years ago called "The Karate Kid." It's a story about a young boy named Daniel who is being bullied by a gang of other boys. So he enlists the help of Mr. Miyagi, an elderly Japanese gardener from his apartment complex, to teach him karate for self-defense.

Mr. Miyagi agrees to teach Daniel, who goes to his home each day. However, instead of jumping straight in to the lessons, Daniel is put to work painting a fence, waxing Mr. Miyagi's car, and sanding the floors in the house. Daniel is growing quite frustrated with his experience. He didn't understand how he was going to learn very much.

What Daniel didn't know is that Mr. Miyagi was teaching him all along. The movements from the chores he was doing were the basics of karate. When Mr. Miyagi demonstrated that he was actually teaching the young student all along, Daniel was amazed and put his trust in him. From that day on, Daniel put his faith in Mr. Miyagi to teach him karate and much more.

In the same way that Daniel discovered in that garden that Mr. Miyagi was the master teacher, the disciples discovered at that wedding in Cana that Jesus was more than simply a master and teacher, and their faith in him grew.

So let's look at ourselves this morning. Where are you in your trust-walk with Jesus? In this gospel lesson John is encouraging us to be open to Jesus as he reveals himself to us. And that revelation may come in so many different ways.

As I have said so many times, don't impose limits on the God of all creation. We may encounter the Christ in a time of prayer or Bible study. Certainly those are things that we need to do regularly and often.

But we also encounter Christ in ordinary everyday situations that we face, through people we may meet. God comes to us in so many ways, and if we allow ourselves to be open to him and to his Christ, he will continue to reveal to us more of who he really is, and through that, our faith, like the disciple's faith, will also be strengthened.

And I want to leave you with one other thought. We find Christ by imitating Christ.

There is a story called "The Happy Hypocrite." It is a story about a man who was born with an awful facial deformity. He grew up alone and lonely.

When reaching adulthood, he decided to move from his town to begin a new life. On his way he discovered a beautiful mask that fit his face, making him look handsome.

At first the mask was uncomfortable and he was afraid that people would find out who he really was, but he continued to wear the mask every day.

In his new hometown, he made many friends and fell in love. But one day a wicked woman from his old home town came to his town and discovered this man's true identity.

In front of his friends and fiancé, she forced him to remove his mask. When he removed the mask, it revealed a handsome face. His face had conformed to the mask.

Finding Christ and becoming like Christ is analogous to this. Go ahead and put on Christ. At first it may feel unnatural or uncomfortable, and maybe you may think, "who am I trying to fool?" But everyday just keep putting on Christ and everyday you will grow to look more like him.

Not physically, of course. We don't even know what he looked like. But in our thoughts, our actions and our relationships, others will be able to see Christ in us.

So as John retells the story of the wedding at Cana where Jesus turned the water into wine. He wants us to look beyond the miracle itself and begin to believe in Jesus and the Father who sent him.

Each of the characters in the story, whether Mary, the wine steward or the disciples, responded to Jesus in a different way, because they came from very different positions and backgrounds.

But they all understood something more of Jesus that they did not understand before as he began to reveal his glory among them.

And that is true for us here today. We come from many different backgrounds and we are at different stages in our journey of faith.

But John is urging us all to be open to understanding who Jesus is, to put our trust in him and to become like him.

May God help us all to do that.