

“The First of His Signs”

*This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples Believed in him (John 2:11).*

“The wine ran out.” We don’t know much about this wedding. John tells us it was “at Cana in Galilee” and he gives us a brief glimpse at the guest list which included Mary and Jesus, and His followers, but that’s about it. Commentators speculate about the unnamed bride and groom and draw all kinds of interesting connections to the family of Mary and Jesus, but the truth is, John reveals almost nothing about the wedding at Cana, except this, “the wine ran out.” And *that* is really all we need to know.

In a culture where wedding feasts lasted for a whole week, running out of wine was a big deal. It was an affront to the guests, it was humiliating to the host, and, in a small Galilean community like Cana, a social failing like would be a source of shame that would haunt this family for generations. So, with the reputation and honor of the bridal party on the line, Mary approached her Son with a report of the desperate situation and an implied plea for help, saying simply: “They have no wine.”

When I was in college, I read an article about making wine out of Welch’s grape juice. The supplies seemed simple enough: a glass jug, a few cups of grape juice, a little sugar, a packet of yeast, and a balloon. Even a poor college student could come up these things, and I felt compelled to give this experiment a try, so I followed the directions from the article, mixing the ingredients and placing the balloon over the mouth of the jug, just like the picture showed...and then the waiting began. The process was supposed to take 30 days, but it seemed interminable, and, as the weeks went by, I frequently checked the bottle of fermenting grape juice, watching the balloon fill with air, impatiently waiting for the moment when I could taste my creation. Finally, after the prescribed 30 days, I took the balloon off the neck of the bottle and poured myself a small glass of the concoction. In dramatic fashion, I slowly and proudly raised the glass to my lips. Then came the moment of truth as I tasted the new wine...*and it was awful!* It was beyond bitter, and completely undrinkable. I poured the remainder of the rancid liquid down the drain and I’ve never attempted to make wine again.

The lesson I learned from my little experiment is that winemaking isn’t easy. It takes expertise and experience and, the truth is, wine takes time! And, at the wedding at the Cana, as the guests grew restless and the family panicked, there was no time and there was no wine, and, in a bold act of faith, Mary brings this need to her Son. Much has been made about Jesus’ response to His mother. To our modern ears, His opening word, “Woman” sounds a bit disrespectful, but don’t let our cultural connotations, detract from the essence of His answer to Mary’s request, because, at the heart of His response is an incredible truth about God. And this is what Jesus said, “My hour has not yet come.”

It’s important that we take a minute to consider this statement. It’s not that Jesus wasn’t prepared to reveal His divinity; in fact, in the previous chapter, Jesus completely freaked Nathanael out by displaying His omniscience when He called him to be one of the disciples. And it wasn’t a comment on the base nature of the need; I mean running out of wine certainly isn’t on par with the needs of blind, or lame, or demon-possessed, but that’s not what this was about. No, when Jesus said, “My hour has not yet come” He was revealing His ultimate purpose and the way it would be accomplished.

Later, in John’s Gospel, following the Palm Sunday procession into Jerusalem that began the week of His suffering and death, Jesus revisits this phrase, and this time, its meaning is crystal clear as He points directly to His death and resurrection, and then boldly states, “*The hour has come* for the Son of Man to be glorified” and “for this purpose I have come *to this hour*” (John 12:23, 27). The reason that Jesus came to earth, and took on our flesh, and even stood in Cana as a wedding guest on this day, all

pointed to His work for us on Calvary, and whether or not Mary completely understood this mission, what happened next in this story, clearly shows us where she put her faith.

John writes, “His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you’” (John 2:5). Undaunted by Jesus’ apparent disclaimer, Mary points the servants to Jesus and then commands them to follow His Words, and, when they do, a miraculous thing occurs. The water became wine! The party was saved, the reputation of the host family was upheld, and the celebration could continue unstained by shame...but the meaning of this miracle goes way beyond a simple Galilean wedding reception. You see, in this first miracle of Jesus, God gave us a beautiful, tangible expression of the love that He has for His church, and, in this obscure occurrence in the tiny town of Cana, Jesus also gave a promise. And, today, it is a promise that we are desperate to hear.

You see, like the family in Cana, we are a people in dire need of help. In the language of our text, we are a people who find themselves completely out of wine; and, if this metaphor is lost on you, I want you consider what this lack looked like in your life last week. Last week, some of you experienced a lack of health as you struggled with physical or emotional illness. Some of you experienced a crisis in your family or in your work that has you ready to give up and walk away. Or maybe last week, your lack came from a deliberate sin that continues to tear your relationships apart, or perhaps from a hardened heart that seeks revenge and refuses to forgive. The truth is that, today, these things are all happening in this congregation. Sickness and shame, humiliation and pain; all of these things are a result of the sin that infects our world and plagues our hearts. Not one of us is untouched and not one of us is innocent. And it’s into this sour, sinful mess, that God breaks through with a word of promise.

John writes, “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’” (John 2:9-10).

My friends, what we see, is not what will be. That is the point of Christ’s miracle at Cana; that is the truth of His promise. In Christ, God has taken the curse of our nature and the filth of our sin and the brokenness of our lives, and, in Him, we are transformed. What we see, is not what we will be! In our Old Testament reading from Isaiah God tells us this very thing as He describes us as His bride: No more will “be termed Forsaken” and our “land shall no more be termed Desolate” because the Bridegroom as given Himself up for His bride the Church! Because, through His death, Jesus has redeemed us! Not because we were a faithful, or lovely, or worthy Bride; but because the Bridegroom is righteous, because the Bridegroom is worthy, because the Bridegroom has spoken.

Mary said to the servant, “Do whatever he tells you.” In other words, whatever Jesus says, that is what will be, that is what works, *that is the truth*. If He says, “Take up your bed and walk” (John 5:8), you walk! If He says, “your sins are forgiven” (Luke 5:20), you are forgiven! If He says to your buried, rotting corpse, “Lazarus! Come out of the grave” (John 12:43), you come out of the grave! And when the Bridegroom calls you His delight, you most certainly are! When He calls you married, you are! When He calls you saved, you are! And, my friends, today Jesus says, “You shall not be called forsaken any longer! As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall you God rejoice over you!”

In Cana at Galilee, Jesus did the first of His signs, and manifested His glory; and in this miracle, He points to a marriage feast that will never end and where the good wine will never run out. And, John writes, “His disciples believed” in this promise from God. *Today, this promise is for you.* Go in the peace of what God has said. Amen.

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