

“Saving the Best for Last,” John 2:1-11, Epiphany 2-C, January 20, 2019

Weddings! Oh, those glorious weddings! Often, there is so much careful **thought, time and money** that goes into planning just the **“Perfect Wedding!”**

Yet, **florists, caterers, mothers of the bride, musicians and pastors**—will all tell you—that **no matter how much careful planning goes into the BIG DAY, INVARIABLY, SOMETHING STILL ALWAYS GOES WRONG!**

Would you like just a couple of examples?

On more than a few occasions, just as the bride and groom begin to speak their wedding vows, the **BEST MAN REALIZES THAT HE HAS LEFT THE WEDDING RINGS** in the glove compartment of his car!

Sometimes the **acolyte**, while lighting all the other **extra candles** in the church that day, **FORGETS AND LIGHTS THE UNITY CANDLE too, that was supposed to be lighted by the bride and groom together, having spoken their vows!**

Recently, I came across a **true story** about a man named **Tim Anderson** and his fiancé **Suzanne Green** who had made plans to be married **in Suzanne’s home church in Atlanta**. They had done their three sessions of premarital counseling with Suzanne’s pastor and at the last of those three sessions, they informed the pastor that **THE BRIDE WAS NOT GOING TO BE TAKING HER HUSBAND’S LAST NAME AS HER OWN**.

Therefore, Tim and Suzanne requested that when the pastor announce them to the gathered guests that he not introduce them as Mr. and Mrs. Tim Anderson but, instead as **“MR. TED ANDERSON AND MRS. SUZANNE GREEN!”**

But unfortunately, old habits die hard, and Suzanne’s pastor said as he usually always had said: *“Ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased to present to you for the first time this evening, Mr. and Mrs. Tim Anderson!”* which **GREATLY DISPLEASED MRS. GREEN**, the new bride!

Blunders, like this, can easily take place at most every wedding and at its reception, **no matter how many hours of preparation are invested ahead of time!**

A blunder is what we see happening at the wedding in Cana in our Gospel lesson today----that **Jesus and his disciples are attending**.

We are not sure exactly who the bride and groom are, but one ancient writing, from one of the **NON-CANONICAL GOSPELS OF THE COPTIC COMMUNITY**, says that **Mary** was there because it was **Mary’s sister’s son**, therefore, **Mary’s nephew, who was getting married**. And it certainly does seem that Mary was there on some type of official capacity.

DURING THE WEDDING RECEPTION, THE WINE RAN OUT. Somebody had made a mistake. Either **too many people had been invited to this shindig**, or **too little wine had been purchased** beforehand, but **whatever the reason, the couple faced an embarrassing situation: The wine supply had run out!**

It’s at this point, that Mary turns to Jesus and asks him to do something about it, which certainly indicates to all of us that she believed that **he *could do something about it***. In fact, she was so confident that her Son would help her that she turns immediately to the hired servants there that day and commands them: **“Do whatever he tells you!”**

Why would Mary have done this? For one thing:

Mary certainly knew that her son was no ordinary person!

Jesus' conception was announced to her by an **angel** and she had been told that her child would be the **Son of God**.

Oh, **we don't really know what transpired in Mary's and Joseph's home as Jesus was growing up**, but there must have been a few things to strengthen Mary's belief in the message the **Angel Gabriel** had brought to her, while she was still a virgin, that the **Child conceived within her, would be done so by the power of the Holy Spirit, was NO ONE LESS than the Son of the Most High God!**

By this time, Mary had become convinced that her Son, now 30 years old, could most certainly **do something** to help this family out of their embarrassing situation!

Why did John choose to include this particular-story in his Gospel account? And at the very front of his Gospel account, no less!?!

An **unbeliever**, reading John's Gospel may have easily surmised that **John is trying to convince his readers that Jesus had some miraculous powers available to him!** But there's got to be more to it than this, for unlike **Matthew's Gospel that includes 22 of Jesus' miracles**, and unlike **Luke's Gospel** that shares with us **21 of Jesus' miracles**, **St. John only chooses 7 of Jesus miracles to share with us**; choices, I am sure, that under the **guidance of the Holy Spirit he had chosen very carefully!**

And yet rather than John's calling these events Jesus' "**miracles**," John calls them "**signs**," a word that stresses the **spiritual significance of Jesus' miracles**, because **signs point to something or someone beyond themselves**. He even tells us that **he records these signs so that readers of his Gospel might believe** that Jesus is indeed the Christ, the Son of God. So, there must be some **spiritual significance to this miracle!**

The problem, however, is that **readers who were unfamiliar with the customs of First Century Judaism, would not have understood the implications of all this without some footnotes printed at the bottom of the page to enlighten them!**

John does tell us, however, that one of the greatest benefits for Jesus' disciples present, after Jesus had changed 120 gallons of water into high quality vintage wines, is that *Jesus' disciples then believed in him*" (v. 11b).

Of course, they had believed in Jesus to a large degree before, but now they are getting a much clearer picture of him as the **long-awaited Promised Messiah**.

All throughout the Old Testament, **the future coming of the kingdom of God into our world in all its fullness, is spoken of, as the people of Israel being invited by the LORD God Almighty to participate with him in a feast of enormous proportions, with plenty of high-quality vintage wines to boot and the choicest cuts of meat!**

But consider this: John relates this incident to us using his excellent storytelling skills, and like any good storyteller, **he builds the story to an "ah-ha" moment, to a statement that really punches home the point he intends to make**. And this statement comes from the mouth of the chief steward, the professional feast-supervisor whose responsibility it is to make sure the guests are properly taken care of. **After Jesus has the servants fill the six large stone jars with water, each containing 20 to 30 gallons, he tells them to then draw some out and take it to the chief steward, presumably so he can approve it before it is served to the guests.**

He tastes it and being most delightfully surprised of this wine's high quality that only a certified wine cynosure like this "Master of the Feast" could make, he says, *"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" (v. 10)!*

On the surface, John's sharing with us this story, might seem to us simply, as John's way of saying that **Jesus has the power to do some pretty-unbelievable things**, but I believe John shares this miracle account with us for at least three other very important reasons.

The first is that Jesus really is God in human flesh, as John has described Jesus in his first chapter: *"The Word of God Made Flesh,"* of whom John also had this to say: *"All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that has been made" (John 1:3).* Here Jesus is creating a high-quality-vintage wine, simply out of water, and quickly as a person could blink their eyes!

The second reason is that in Jewish thought, the coming of the kingdom of God into our world is often portrayed to us in the Old Testament as the celebration of a great wedding feast!

Listen to **Isaiah 25:6-8**, *"On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, of rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well-refined. And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken!"*

And in **Isaiah 55:1-3**, we read: *"Come everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money come, by and eat. Come buy wine and milk without money and without price!"* Why do you spend your money for that, which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food.

Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David" (Isaiah 55:1-3). One reason that John shares with us this miracle is that in it we can see the glory of God being displayed, but not in a **frightening, scary, hair-raising, I'm-now-shaking-in-my -boots** kind of way!

When the thunder was popping and the lightning was bursting forth from the top of Mount Sinai, and God speaking directly to the people of Israel, they were so frightened and so scared they told Moses, *"Tell God no to speak to us like that ever again, but to give you the messages that you could then share with us, is safe doses" (Exodus)!*

That's how it was for Moses one day when God asked to see him. God told Moses, *"No one can see me in live!"* not in all my glory! But then God told Moses, go over there and stand behind that cleft in the Rock, and I will flash by you super quick!" And when God did so, Moses did catch a glimpse of him.

This is why Augustus Toplady wrote that magnificent hymn: “Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in thee, let the water and the blood, from thy riven side which flowed, be of sin the double-cure, cleanse me of its guilt and power!” (LSB 761:1).

Christ says on the night before he dies, “*These things have I spoken to you that my JOY may be in you and that your joy may be full*” (John 15:11)!

But the number one reason I believe John shares with us this miracle is to remind us that when it comes to our following Jesus God always saves the best for last. At the end of all our earthly struggles, God has a place reserved for us in heaven with him, because our names have been written, by the grace of God, into THE LAMB’S BOOK OF LIFE.

John wants us to know that just as the wine Jesus created was superior to the previously served wine, so the provision for our salvation that came with Jesus’ entry into our world is far superior to the previous provision for salvation that was given to the people of Israel under the Old Testament Mosaic law.

In fact, again in chapter one of John’s Gospel, he says precisely this very thing: “*For the law was given through Moses; but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ! No one has ever seen God; the only God-who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known to us*” (John 1:17-18)!

³¹*The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* ³

⁴*No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more” Jeremiah 31:31-34!*

So, in narrating this story of Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding feast, John is not only telling an actual event from the life of Jesus but also using it to convey that God has done a far greater thing than had ever been done before; God saving his best for last in sending Jesus to us to be our Savior, so that we might receive the forgiveness of all our sins, and the sure promise of a life in heaven with him one day!

Three Rings: Marriage is a three-ring circus. First there is the engagement ring. Secondly there is the wedding ring. And thirdly, there is the suffering.

One morning a wife says to her husband, **our new next-door neighbor kisses his wife every morning when he leaves for work. Why don’t you do that!** Her husband replied: **“Because I don’t even know who she is.”**

One day a son asked his father: **“Dad what’s the difference between love and marriage?”** His father replied: **“Love is blind, but marriage is a real eye-opener!”**

My son asked me one day: **“Dad, what it like to be married?”** He said, **“Son, leave me alone!”** And then when he did, I asked him: **“Son why are you ignoring me?”** Amen