

THE FIRST MIRACLE

ISAIAH 62:1-5
JOHN 2:1-11

A SERMON FOR ORDINARY TIME
SUNDAY, JANUARY 20, 2013
First Presbyterian Church
Marianna, Florida
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I've never quite understood why John is the only one of the four gospel writers to record the story of the First Miracle of Jesus. I wonder if this is a story that John learned from Mary the mother of Jesus, or if John the author of the gospel was the same John that Jesus had already called to be one of His apostles. Maybe John was there at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, when Jesus performed His first miracle. John tells us that Mary, the mother of Jesus was there, and that Jesus and His disciples were also invited.

I have this view of the events of the day: Jesus took His fishing buddies, the disciples, to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, can't you just see Mary, hands on hips, giving Jesus the look that only a mother can give, and saying, "They have no more wine." Implicit in that statement is an accusation about who is responsible for the shortage. She didn't come out and say, "Your friends drank all the wine. What are you going to do about it?" But the message is clear!

William Barclay suggests that in John's gospel, there are always two things going on. There is the simple story, and then there is the deeper meaning. Thus, Barclay sees John's gospel as a series of parables, of teaching stories. The stories themselves are great! The messages they give us are even greater.

The story itself is of a wedding. Then and now, weddings are occasions of great celebration, often costly affairs, with parties before and after. Then and now, weddings are often the social event of the year. For the host family to run out of food or beverage at a wedding was a social disaster.

But they had plenty of water! Water was important at a celebration, as a sign of hospitality, as a necessary ingredient in the purifying ceremonies of the Jews.

The roads were unpaved and dusty, so guests, travelers were provided water to wash their feet. And often a servant or a slave washed the feet of special invited guests. More importantly, observant Jews then and now washed their hands before a meal and between every course, offering a prayer each time.

When Mary pointed out the shortage of wine, Jesus responded by having the wine jars filled to the brim with water. Water was used for washing. Wine was what the people drank, with the simplest of meals, and at the fanciest of parties.

In the time of Christ, they didn't have iced tea, coffee, Coca-Cola, Dr. Pepper, Gatorade. The beverage of choice was wine. And yes, it was fermented grape juice. Yes, it contained alcohol.

The drinking of wine is not discouraged or forbidden in scripture. In fact, it appears that the Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to take a little wine for the good of his stomach. It is drunkenness, over-indulgence, a lack of temperance or moderation, that is forbidden.

Wine was a constant, and it was to be used responsibly, as all God's gifts are to be used responsibly.

Some of our more theologically conservative brothers and sisters have problems with this first miracle of Jesus. They don't drink wine, and so they can't imagine why Jesus would! Some have actually tried to explain away the miracle, saying, "Well, it wasn't real wine."

Folks, the Bible says it wasn't only real wine, it was the best wine! Jesus wasn't going to make an inferior wine, a watered down wine. If Jesus was making wine out of water, He was going to make the best wine anyone had ever tasted! When Jesus transforms something ordinary, it becomes something extraordinary. He did that with His disciples, and He does that with you and me, and He certainly could do that with the water He turned to wine.

That is the deeper meaning that underlies the story of the first miracle. That is what the disciples saw at the wedding at Cana in Galilee: they saw Jesus take something ordinary, and turn it into something extraordinary. They saw Jesus change water into wine, but they didn't laugh at it as though it was a parlor trick. They didn't see it as magic. They saw it as a miracle. They saw His glory revealed in what He did.

In his commentary on this story, William Barclay points out that this story tells us a lot about the character, the personality, of Jesus. Jesus is a person who celebrated, who went to parties, who drank wine with His family and friends. He is joyous in His living, and we who are Christians would do well to remember that.

To many in the world, Christians are seen as dour, angry, unhappy, rigid, judgmental people.

What a contrast that is to the character and personality of Jesus!

I think one of the reasons that John tells us twice in His gospel about Jesus shedding tears is that he did it so rarely. I think Jesus laughed a lot, and I wish when Matthew, Mark, Luke and John had written their gospels, they'd put in words like, "And Jesus laughed."

But His disciples didn't laugh when they saw Him change the water into wine. They were awestruck. They beheld His glory; the glory that John told us in the first chapter is like the glory of the only begotten son of the Father.

Now what does that mean to us today?

When Jesus comes into our lives, Jesus changes us from water to wine. Jesus changes us from the ordinary to the extraordinary. We are transformed. And it is by showing our transformed selves to the world that we can best glorify God. The Battle Hymn of the Republic tells us that Jesus has a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me. Well, that transfiguration, that transformation, may not be a visible thing. It could be. The smile on one's face when one has the love of Jesus in one's heart, the smile on one's face when one has the joy of Jesus in one's life, the smile on one's face when one has the peace of Jesus in one's soul, that is a physical manifestation of a spiritual state.

But you know, the disciples couldn't tell by looking at the wine that it was the best. Oh, it might have had the richest color, but the proof of the wine was in the tasting. And the proof of the transformation in our lives is in the way we live them.

When we live our lives to the glory of God, when we do everything we do to build up the kingdom of God, when in everything we do we are seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, then we are truly glorifying God.

But don't forget to enjoy it!

Don't you know that Jesus enjoyed the wedding at Cana in Galilee, even if He had to do a little work, a little miracle there. Don't you know He laughed! And maybe sang! He might even have danced! Maybe even with His mother!

That is what Jesus calls us to do: to be transformed, to glorify God, and to enjoy God's grace, God's goodness, God's richness, forever. When we do less, we fail to be the people that God created us to be, that Jesus transforms us to be.

Let us pray:

Lord, turn us into wine. Transform us that we might give you glory, by showing the world what a difference you make in our lives. And help us to live in the joy of being who and what you want us to be. In your name Jesus we pray. Amen.