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# THE FIRST WORD

FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BONITA SPRINGS

## The Grape Depression

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SERMON BY REV. BRAD ROGERS ■ OCTOBER 9, 2022

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According to a study in 2010, approximately 72% of those interviewed say that it was the best day of their lives. But to be honest, this day can be like *A Tale of Two Cities*. It can be “the best of times” and, sometimes, “the worst of times”: **the wedding day!**

Weddings are wonderful days because the whole family gets together. And, weddings can sometimes be challenging... because the WHOLE family gets together. Weddings can bring out the very best in people. The covenantal commitment to love one another in good times and in bad, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health throughout all of life is a beautiful reflection of the prodigal love of God, who loves us with an everlasting love. As such, weddings bring out the best in people. But sometimes weddings also bring out the worst in people. We have even coined a word for it, and there was a reality show by the same name that lingered for about 13 seasons. Have you ever heard of—or worse, known—a “Bridezilla”? Weddings can lead to a bride becoming bossy, demanding, entitled, and rude. The truth is that if you look at wedding pictures, everyone looks beautiful and happy. But if you could look just off-camera, you might find that there are some imperfections.

I have had the privilege of participating in many weddings. It’s an occupational hazard, I suppose. Over my years in ministry, I have seen many things, but I have never seen a *perfect* wedding day. The most vulnerable part of the wedding is at the reception, when the DJ hands the microphone to the best man or maid of honor. Often, these folks are not accustomed to public speaking (and they may have

been hitting the open bar hard for a few hours by the time their speech is delivered), so when they get up to speak things can get a little awkward. Several years ago, I went to one of my best friend's weddings, and the maid of honor began her toast with the following sentence: "I never liked many of [the bride's] boyfriends. And [the groom] was no exception." I would love to tell you that it started at that low point and got better from there, but it was all downhill as she continued to awkwardly *roast*, not *toast*, the groom.

Once, I officiated an outdoor wedding in July at a beautiful bed and breakfast in the country. It was a hot and sunny July day. Knowing that the bride and groom had a schedule to keep, I did my part to keep things on time. I lined up the groomsmen about 10 minutes before the service was scheduled to begin. Unfortunately, the bride didn't arrive until 45 minutes *after* the wedding was to have begun! So, for just shy of an hour, the groom was lined up, ready to start the ceremony, and **sweating**—not only because he was wearing a tuxedo in the midsummer heat, but also because he was genuinely worried about a runaway bride! My pastoral care skills were tested that day as I tried to assure him that she just wanted to look her best.

No wedding is perfect. Can you remember anything that went wrong on your wedding day? Perhaps the imperfections of your wedding were not quite as bad as the ones I've mentioned, but something always goes awry. Often, you can look back at the subtle imperfections with laughter. At my wedding, the cake topper was lost and the bouquet that Lauren was to throw at the reception didn't show up with the rest of the flowers. But you make the best of it, right? Because in the grand scheme of things, the commitment to one another before God and your closest family and friends is really all that matters.

Our Scripture passage today is about a wedding that was nearly derailed by a debacle. Jesus and five of His disciples had been invited to the wedding—thank God (pun intended)—because, like the weddings you may have attended, things were about to go down. There was almost a serious social faux pas. Here is the account as recorded in the Gospel of John, chapter 2, verses 1-11.

**O**n the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, <sup>2</sup>and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup>When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

<sup>4</sup>"Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

<sup>5</sup>His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

<sup>6</sup>Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

<sup>7</sup>Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

<sup>8</sup>Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, <sup>9</sup>and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside <sup>10</sup>and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

<sup>11</sup>What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

There was about to be a big problem, and Mary called it like it was. "They have no more wine!" (verse 3). You can almost hear the panic in her voice. Jesus responded to the grape depression by performing a miracle.

### **The Surprising Nature of the Miracle**

What a surprising first miracle for Jesus to perform! It stands in contrast to how some people view Jesus today. Some people envision Jesus as being a sort of killjoy, a cosmic fun-hater. They presume, "If you want to have a good time, it's probably best **not** to invite Jesus."

Frankly, it's why I seldom attend the reception unless I know the couple really well. A pastor seated at the table during the reception can be a real buzzkill, and that is how people tend to see Jesus today. Yet, partly because of the miracles (about which we just read), Jesus was not perceived in that way by His contemporaries at all. Rather, He was frequently accused of hanging out with sinners and tax collectors. In Matthew 11:19, Jesus himself addressed the way He was perceived by saying, "The Son of Man [His most common self-designation] came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners...'"

Jesus was God incarnate, the fullness of divinity draped in human flesh, yet despite His humanity, He was entirely unblemished by human sin. Still, He was often accused of being a reveler. Most of the religious leaders during the time of Christ (as well as many Jews today) assumed that a Holy God could not be in the presence of sinful humanity, so the notion that God became a human being and entered history was unthinkable. Yet, this is precisely what happened. God took on human flesh and the infinitely Holy God dwelt among sinful humanity. He walked with, talked with, ate with, and drank with regular humans; He even went to weddings where He supplied the best wine. Naturally, He was thoroughly loved by and endeared to those who were mired in sin.

We may speculate that Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding because His mother Mary had a role to play in the wedding. From the details in the text, it seems that she may have been one of the wedding planners. Surely, she was not one of the wedding venue's staff, but she seems to have been a volunteer coordinator who ensured that things went smoothly. Some have wondered if this was because the wedding was for one of Mary's relatives. Taking her job seriously, Mary took notice when the open bar at the reception ran dry. Culturally, the bride and groom were responsible for providing an abundant feast for their guests, and in a shame-based culture, running out of wine would have been a major social

bungle for the bride and groom. Recognizing the potential for their embarrassment, Mary took it upon herself to do something about it. She turned to the One to whom she knew she could turn in times of crisis—Jesus.

### **The First Miracle**

At that time, Jesus had not yet performed any miracles. We have no biblical evidence of childhood miracles Jesus might have performed, like smiting a bully at school, turning stones into bread or clay pigeons into live birds. So, it is interesting that Mary turned to Jesus. Perhaps she wasn't expecting a miracle but just some help. It's possible that she had come to rely on Him for everything. Notably missing from this passage—especially if it was a family wedding—is any mention of Jesus' earthly father, Joseph. It could be that he had already gone the way of all humanity. If Mary were a widow, as the eldest son, Jesus might have provided for her by working as a carpenter. When Mary did not know what to do, she turned to Jesus... and so can we. When we're not sure where to turn, we can always turn to Jesus. There will be many in our community today who are at a loss about what to do. They may find their way into area churches in search of help. It is right to turn to Jesus when we do not know what to do.

Mary said, "Jesus, they have no wine!" And Jesus' reply to her is perhaps the most interesting part of the whole passage. He said, "Woman, why involve me in this?" (verse 4). Our American ears may have pricked up at the use of the term "woman," but it is unlikely that it would have come across as harshly to Mary as it seems to us. He isn't saying, "Woman, back off!" It was not a term of exasperation. Rather, perhaps the biblical ground for interpreting this word is the tender moment to which the Gospel consistently keeps pointing, the Crucifixion. Affectionately, from the Cross, ever the caretaker of His mother, Jesus entrusted the care of His beloved mother to the disciple whom He loved, saying, "Woman, here is your son" (John 19:26).

In essence, when Jesus said, “Why involve me in this?” He was really suggesting that a time was coming when His glory would be revealed. Actually, the whole fourth Gospel leans forward toward that moment. His glory would be revealed when He is crucified as “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). He said, “My hour has not yet come” (verse 4), yet Mary did not relent. Almost as though she hadn’t heard Jesus, she turned to the servants at the party—and the way they listened to her suggests that she had some formal role as a wedding coordinator—to tell them, “Do whatever He tells you” (verse 5).

Nearby, there were six stone water jars that would have been used for ceremonial washing. Jesus had the wedding servants fill them to the brim with water, which is the first indication of the extravagance of this miracle. Just imagine: At Jesus’ command, the servants dunked cups into jars so filled to the brim that water spilled over the edges. The servants took a sample to the master of the banquet, who said that the resulting wine was better than the wine that had previously been served! “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now” (verse 10).

The bride and groom saved face and the open bar continued. Just in case you are wondering, it’s likely that ancient wine was nowhere near as strong as today’s wine. The wine was probably a ratio of three parts water to two parts wine. Thus, Jesus wasn’t trying to encourage revelry; something else was going on. The goal of the story was not for revelry, but for revelation: “Jesus... **revealed** his glory... and his disciples believed in him” (verse 11). The surprising miracle of the open bar is a demonstration of Christ’s glory.

## **The Miracle Reveals ...**

### **1. Jesus as the Messiah**

This miracle revealed to His disciples that Jesus was the Messiah—God’s anointed One who had long ago been promised. Over 600 years before Jesus performed this miracle, the scriptures had pointed

to a day when the Messiah would come, and the messianic age would be ushered in with extravagant abundance. Jeremiah wrote that when the Messiah comes,

They will come and shout for joy on the heights of Zion;  
they will rejoice in the bounty of the LORD—  
the grain, the new wine and the olive oil,  
the young of the flocks and herds.  
They will be like a well-watered garden,  
and they will sorrow no more.

Jeremiah 31:12

Jesus is ushering in an age of abundance. Jesus had all six of the stone jars filled to the brim and turned into 180 gallons of wine. Here is an easy way to think of it: It would be as if Jesus uncorked 909 bottles of wine at a modern-day reception. Now, Cana was a small village and probably the wedding consisted of just a few dozen folks. There was no conceivable way they were going to consume all the wine Jesus had made. In fact, no wedding today would be able to do that! I've seen some that have tried, but it would be impossible! This was a miracle of transforming scarcity into abundance.

### **No Scarcity Mentality**

God is a God of generous abundance, but we live in a world where it can be easy to develop a *scarcity* mentality. In an age of runaway inflation, high food and gas prices, stock market volatility, and concerns about how global events—including a Category 4 hurricane making landfall on our coast and affecting food, gas, clean water, and many other things—will continue to impact the local economy, we quickly shift from viewing the world as plentiful to viewing the world as an arid desert. We begin to focus on what we do *not* have, rather than being grateful for what we *do* have.

A scarcity mentality negatively affects us in countless ways. It lowers our sense of satisfaction. We become fixated on chasing what we cannot have, and we devalue what is before us. A scarcity mentality

also lowers our brain function—some researchers have suggested that it can lower our IQ by 13 to 14 points. It reduces our ability to creatively solve problems. What’s worse, it lowers our gaze from what really matters to striving for things in this world. It can lead to hoarding what we have rather than blessing those around us as God has blessed us.

Interestingly, Mary saw what was missing, but did not succumb to a scarcity mentality; she kept her eyes on Jesus! The Great Banquet Giver, Jesus, provided for the wedding in abundance. Why? Because God’s grace is *abundant*, and God lavishes it upon us. As it says in Ephesians 1:3, 7-8a:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ... <sup>7</sup>In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace <sup>8</sup>that he lavished on us.

Do you see the abundance? God can shape our imaginations so that we are not hindered by a scarcity mentality but are given an *abundance* mentality. If God blessed you, it is for a reason: not to hoard your blessings but to release them sacrificially to bless others.

## **The Miracle Reveals ...**

### **2. Jesus’ Glory**

The second thing that this miracle reveals is Jesus’ glory. The passage says the disciples saw “his glory... and believed in him” (verse 11). In John’s Gospel, all things are pointing to Jesus and revealing His glory. In this case, Jesus is revealing what He is about to do sacramentally. Later, when gathered around the table with His disciples, Jesus held up the cup—one filled with wine—and declared, “This cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28).

In the sacrament, the wine symbolized His blood which He would shed on the cross. The abundance of wine demonstrates the abun-



dance of God's grace. God's grace is abundantly sufficient for those who profess faith in Jesus. Some have a scarcity mentality when it comes to God's forgiveness. In our limited imaginations, we cannot conceive of how God could ever forgive us. But God's grace, through His shed blood, is sufficient.

### **The Miracle Reveals ...**

#### **3. Our Future Glory**

Finally, while the miracle of turning water into wine may be surprising, the fact that it took place at a wedding is not; it is consistent with the symbol God uses to enable us to capture His vision for humanity. The scriptures often depict Jesus as the bridegroom and the church as His bride. For example, Revelation 21:2-4 demonstrates a vision of our future glory. John writes,

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup>He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

In this manner, Jesus demonstrates again our future glory through Christ. Through the glory revealed in the outpouring of Jesus' blood, we have hope of future glory where God will dwell among us and we with God for all eternity. This hope of future glory is, once again, not given for the purpose of making us "pie in the sky" Christians, but in order that we might capture God's vision and, within our sphere of influence, seek to allow God to establish His kingdom in our lives and communities here and now. It reveals Jesus as the Messiah and His sacrificial glory.

## Invitation

We are about to gather around the Lord's Table, to participate in the Great Banquet to which our Lord has invited us. Like the Miracle in Cana, this table represents the abundance of God's love, the Glory of God poured out from the cross to deliver us from our sins, and the hope for our future glory.

Maybe you are here today and, like Mary, not sure where to turn for help. May you follow her example and turn to Jesus. Maybe you are here today wondering if God could ever forgive you for where you have been and what you have done. This passage and this table remind us of the abundance of God's grace and mercy.

We gather with a great cloud of witnesses, those who have gone before us in the faith, and all Christians around the world. This meal is a foretaste of the abundance to come. All are invited! Come! ■

