

“The Miracle of Joy”
John 2:1-11
June 12, 2016

INTRODUCTION:

Throughout the Sundays of these summer weeks, we will be looking at various miracles of Jesus. My plan is to begin with the seven miracles John selects for mention in his Gospel. He refers to these miracles as “signs.” We all know what a sign is. You may have noticed that we have two new church signs in front of our building. Though the signs say “Altadena Valley Presbyterian Church,” we all understand that the sign itself is not the church but rather points to the church. According to John, the miracles of Jesus serve that same purpose, pointing us to something. To what do they point?

I believe that these signs are all intended to point to the nature of the kingdom Jesus brings to his people. The kingdom of God was a central theme in Jesus’ ministry. He preached the good news of the kingdom and he performed miracles that pointed to the nature of that kingdom. In the verse just before the first miracle, turning water into wine, Jesus told Nathaniel that he would see heaven opened. Through his miracles, we are seeing the opening of heaven, the heavenly kingdom coming to the earth with the coming of Jesus. Three of the seven miracles of Jesus in John are healing miracles, intended to point to the fact that Jesus will make all things new in his kingdom. He doesn’t make all new things, but all things new. Every part of our lives, physical, emotional and spiritual, parts broken by the fall, will be made new. In another sign miracle, Jesus feeds the multitudes, showing us that he provides for his people. In his final miracle, he raises Lazarus from the dead, showing that he will put an end even to that great enemy of every person who has ever drawn breath, death itself.

How about this first miracle, changing water into wine? At one level, it’s a curious place to begin. Running low on wine at the end of a wedding reception would not be classified by most of us as a world-class tragedy. It ranks not far above the florist forgetting to include the boutonnieres for the groomsmen. Of all the miracles Jesus did, why would this one be selected and why did John mention it first? In order to answer that question, we must understand the significance of wine to the Jews. In the Jewish mind, wine is a symbol of joy. Psalm 104:15 says that God makes **“wine to gladden the heart of man.”** Amos 9:13 says that the days are coming when **“the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.”** This is a miracle, then, not just about Jesus helping a desperate wedding host who had run short of wine, but about Jesus supplying the joy of the new kingdom he had come to establish. This joy is not something just for the future, but available to us presently. The miracle of turning water into wine is one that can be realized in your life. Jesus can turn the most common compound in the world, H²O, into the best wine. He can change the most ordinary circumstances in life, into exquisite joy. Joy was the first

miracle performed by Jesus, and joy was the first recorded response someone had to Jesus. Do you remember that time when Mary visited her cousin Elizabeth right after her conception? Elizabeth was six months pregnant with John the Baptist, and she reports that as soon as Mary greeted her, the baby in her womb leaped for joy. Jesus has come that we might have joy everlasting. Let's look further at this as we trace the main three movements of the story.

I. They Have no Wine.

Wine was a far more essential part of weddings in Jesus' day than in our own. The wedding celebration was considered the most grand event in a person's life. The customary wedding celebration at this time began with a feast, which was then followed by the wedding ceremony itself. Then the bride and groom would be escorted to their home in a torchlight parade. Instead of a honeymoon, they would have an open house for a week in which people would visit them and congratulate them on their marriage. The bride and groom were treated as a king and a queen during this week and actually wore crowns on their heads. It was especially important for the poor to have a joyful wedding celebration, since the suffering accompanying their poverty would be interrupted only by the joy of this week. And it seems that this was likely a wedding of those suffering from such poverty. Jesus and his family were poor, as were most of their friends and acquaintances. And the insufficient amount of wine was probably due more to this family's poverty than to poor planning. So to run out of wine would be more than a small crisis. It would threaten the main purpose of the wedding, giving a momentary respite of joy to those who would know more than a small amount of suffering for the rest of their lives.

Mary somehow becomes aware of the crisis and informs her son, Jesus, of it with the simple statement, **"They have no wine."** It's interesting to me that she makes a statement instead of giving a command. And in her statement, she presents Jesus with the problem and says nothing about how a solution might come. This tells us something about the way Mary and Jesus normally interacted with one another. Remember that Jesus was Mary's firstborn, and remember too that at some point prior to this Mary had been widowed by the death of Joseph. As her oldest son, it would be natural for Mary to look to Jesus for help. Clearly, he had helped her and the family so many times in the past that she simply assumed he would do so again, even in the midst of a problem that was not small. And Jesus had shown himself so resourceful in providing such help that Mary presents him only with the problem and says nothing about how he might solve the problem.

Let me say again that this story is about more than wine. It is about the miracle of joy Jesus brings. We learn from Mary's statement that the first thing required for experiencing this miracle is simply to admit that we have no joy without Jesus. The joy reservoir quickly empties without Jesus supplying it. Have you run out of wine? Has the joy run out in your life? Before answering that

question, let me warn you about three ways we fail to come to this place of admitting that we don't have joy apart from Jesus. The first way is the person who has no joy and has concluded that he never will. This person wants joy, but despairs of ever finding any.

A second way we fail to say "I have no joy" is through cynicism that joy is even possible. This person avoids despair by convincing herself that real joy is not possible for anyone, so it's best to learn not to desire it. If you can convince yourself that the desire for joy is like a desire to fly like Peter Pan, then you can somewhat minimize the pain of not experiencing joy.

The third way is the artificial joy of simply putting a happy face on to cover up a sad heart. A favorite movie for Wendy and me is a rather bizarre movie about Australian competitive ballroom dancing. One of the main characters in the movie is a mother whose dream it has been for her son to be the ballroom dancing champion. As that dream crumbles before her, she will often break down into a puddle of tears and sadness. When that happens, her son's teacher will say to her, "Now, now, let's put our happy face on." The camera then shows her forcing herself to smile even when her heart is sad. I think this is a common Christian response to the lack of joy. We simply pretend to have joy. What we should do instead is to do what Mary did: tell Jesus that you have no joy. Don't tell him how to provide you with joy. Give your problem of joylessness to Jesus and let him figure out the solution.

II. Jesus Has More than Enough Wine.

Jesus' response to his mother is puzzling. **"Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."** In our culture, if a son called his mother, "Woman," we would consider him to be disrespectful and rude. Jesus wasn't being rude here, but he probably was being abrupt. If he wasn't being rude, he was certainly being a bit cryptic. What did he mean? It seems that he is declining to help her, but Mary then interprets his answer as agreement and tells the servants to "do whatever he tells you."

So what did Jesus mean by his answer to Mary? What's clear is that when Jesus mentions that his "hour" has not yet come, he is referring to his crucifixion. Jesus repeatedly used this phrase about his hour to refer to his death. What's not so clear is how his answer relates to Mary's request. She asks him to do something about the wine shortage and he replies by saying that the time of his death has not yet come. What's the connection between wine and Jesus' death? What does every single person think about when they attend another person's wedding? They think about their own wedding, don't they? Jesus was thinking about his wedding to his bride, the Church. This is described in passages like Revelation 19:7. **"Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready."** In order to provide wine for that wedding, Jesus would have to

die on the cross and be raised again, but it wasn't time for that just yet. That's what he tells Mary. But once he clarifies that point, he goes on to make good the deficiency in this bridegroom's supply of wine.

Jesus supplies abundant wine and good wine. Each of the six jars he ordered filled with water held between 20 and 30 gallons. So this was between 120 and 180 gallons of wine. And it was good wine, leading the master of the feast to comment on its high quality. What does this tell us about how we can have the joy Jesus provides? We saw in the previous point that we must be ready to say "I have no joy apart from Jesus." Now, we see two things Jesus does to bring his joy to us, each of which requires a response from us.

The first thing Jesus does in bringing his joy to us is to cleanse us from our sins by his death on the cross. By doing so, our relationship with God is restored, a relationship which we were created to enjoy. This leads to something we must do if we are to experience the joy Jesus provides. We must be willing to tell the truth about our sin and our need of Jesus' cleansing. My instincts tell me that the way to have joy is to be competent, proficient and right. My instincts are dead wrong. The path to joy isn't through being right, but through seeing and admitting the truth about how wrong I am. Every week in our worship service when we confess our sins corporately, we are inviting you into joy. We drink the wine of heaven when we confess our sins and experience the glorious freedom of the gospel. So consider praying the prayer of Psalm 139. **"Search me, O god, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"**

The second thing Jesus does is to direct our lives, just as he directed the servants on what they were to do. What we are called to do, then, is to surrender ourselves to Jesus' direction. It's not hard to imagine these servants having some objections to Jesus' orders. There was no indoor plumbing in these days, and the only way to get water into these jars was to carry it. Water is heavy, weighing over 8 pounds for each gallon. If we take the mid-range of these jars as 25 gallons each, these servants had to carry 150 gallons weighing a total of 1,250 pounds. And what did carrying water have to do with the problem Jesus was addressing, the lack of wine? They might reasonably expect Jesus to go off in search of a wine merchant rather than filling large jugs of water. If you want the wine of God's joy, you will have to surrender to Jesus' control of your life. If you want to have a life without joy, then you will want to ask Jesus to submit to your control. Have you noticed how that works even on a daily level? You begin the day by planning your agenda, but things don't work out quite as you had imagined. If you hold rigidly to your agenda, you are going to experience significant frustration and probably not a small amount of anger. But if you surrender that control to Jesus, you will experience joy in your life.

III. Jesus Saves the Best Wine for Last.

The master of the feast, a type of master of ceremonies, comments on how this bridegroom is different from all the rest. They serve the best wine first, and then when people have drunk enough no longer to notice, they bring out the cheap wine. But this bridegroom, supplied by Jesus, saves the best for last. That is a comment about more than Middle Eastern wedding ceremonies; it speaks of the ways of God in contrast to the ways of this world. In this world, every joy never quite lives up to its promise. Do you know the way a much-anticipated vacation is never quite as good as what it seemed to be in the planning and anticipation? All of life is that way. There is much that seems to promise satisfaction and joy, but in the end it only amounts to so much cheap wine.

For the Christian, the best is yet to come. The ultimate fulfillment of this passage will be in the marriage supper of the Lamb. Whatever joy you taste in this life is but a preview of the much greater joy of being wed to Jesus. St. Theresa of Avila said, "The first moment in the arms of Jesus will make a thousand years of misery on earth look like one night in a bad hotel."

CONCLUSION:

In the early years of television, there was a television show called *The Art Linkletter Show*. There was always a segment of that show when Art Linkletter would question a group of children about something. On one show, he was asking the kids to tell about their favorite Bible story, and one little girl said her favorite story in the Bible was when Jesus turned water into wine. Art said, "Yes, that is a wonderful miracle, isn't it?" He then asked the little girl what that miracle tells us. She said, "When you're out of wine, all you have to do is get down on your knees and pray." She's not far off the mark. If you're fresh out of joy, renounce looking to yourself for joy and go to Jesus through repentance, faith and submission.