

## **A Wedding in Cana**

Back to School: Part 4 “A Wedding in Cana”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – September 3, 2023

14<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

**Readings:** John 2:1-11

**Reflection:** Psalm 16

**Greeting:** Scripture helps you to be wise in seeking salvation. All scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching. Scripture equips each person to do what is good. Let us learn and continue to grow in Christ our Lord!

**Prayer:** God, we believe that you provide us with all that we need in this life. You have not set us adrift in a sea of ignorance but have set us on the path of wisdom. Help us that we may grow in your love and knowledge. Let us never stop learning about your mercy and grace. Give to us a spirit that is eager to always know more so that we may do more for your sake. Help us to walk in your ways and that we may always seek your truth. And give to us a heart that we may love you more day by day as we share your love with the world. And may you guide us and lead us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Reflection:** Psalm 16

*The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; I have a goodly heritage. I bless the Lord, who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. Therefore my heart is glad, and my soul rejoices; my body also rests secure. For you do not give me up to Sheol or let your faithful one see the Pit. You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:5-11 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 16 and we hear of security with the Lord. That we can trust in God in all things. That his steadfast love and faithfulness is always there to strengthen and guide us. What is something that has made your heart glad this week? What has made your soul rejoice? Have you given thanks to God for those things? What is something you can do in the coming week to share the joy we find in Christ? In what way can we share that love with those around us? How can we join together to always learn more in God’s love and care?

**Prayer:** Lord, we turn to you in all things knowing that you are always there for us. Help us to continue to grow in knowledge and truth by your Holy Spirit. Help us to grow in mercy and grace through our risen Savior. As we come before you this day we bring to you the concerns and joys that we have shared aloud together. We bring before you the unspoken worries and

celebrations of our hearts. May you guide us and lead us so that we know your blessing in our joy and our sorrow. We pray you will help us to grow in love through our laughter and our tears. May your steadfast love and faithfulness be our constant guide and companion. And may we always continue to grow in faith and in love, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

**Sermon:**

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our reading for today comes from John chapter 2 verses 1 through 11, the story of the miracle at a wedding in Cana.

*On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the person in charge of the banquet." So they took it. When the person in charge tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), that person called the bridegroom and said to him, "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." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him. (John 2:1-11 NRSV\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

We take a trip into the Gospels for this week's message. We hear the story of the first sign from the Gospel of John, where Jesus performs the miracle of turning water into wine. Now, in the children's version of this story the entire focus is on the miracle itself. The whole story is that we should be amazed about water becoming wine. Though amazing, I think there is more depth to this story. I think there is more that we can take away from this story as adults. There is a lot of symbolism that we might miss if we stick with the children's Sunday School version. I say that because we get some elements that we may not be able to understand without some background information. Our story begins at a wedding. Jesus, his mother, and the disciples are invited to a wedding. A side note is that Mary is not named in John's Gospel, which may have simply been to cut down on confusion with different women named Mary. So, Mary discovers that the wine has run out at this wedding. When we think about a modern wedding, this might be a small oversight. This brings us to the first bit of information we may want to know. We may want to know how long these celebrations could last. Often, we think about weddings today and how long a wedding reception lasts. Most likely we imagine a few hours. We then take that idea, and we insert it into this wedding in Cana. But that isn't the case

for this wedding. A wedding at the time of Jesus would often be a seven-day affair with people coming and going all week. I think it's important for us to understand how long one of the celebrations could last so that we can understand the full context of what Jesus does. We aren't sure how long they have been celebrating, but running out of wine at a celebration like this would be seen as a social faux pas. Weddings are a big community event, and a lot of people get invited. Running out of wine would be a pretty big problem, and that is why Mary steps in.

Now, something else to note here is that it is not Jesus who volunteers his services. It's his mom. Mary discovers that the wine has run out and decides that Jesus is going to fix the problem. Jesus asks what that has to do with them. It isn't his problem. And he says something else here that we need to pay attention to. Jesus says that his hour has not yet come. This begins to draw us into some of the symbolism that is running throughout this narrative. We need to take a look at what Jesus means when he says this. This is the first sign in John's Gospel account. This first miracle is like tapping the very first domino in a row. It sets off a chain of events that will to his death on a cross. This is the beginning point in John, and everything branches out from here. It sets in motion all the events that lead to the cross and Christ recognizes that in saying his hour has not yet come. But Mary is not dissuaded by the argument. Indeed, Mary shows a tremendous amount of faith in the situation. Her faith is quite simply that if they do whatever Jesus says that it will work out. Interestingly, Mary here shows us stronger faith than most any of the disciples. She doesn't know how Jesus will fix the problem. He hasn't even said he will fix the problem. But her faith is strong enough to simply believe. And her faith is proven to have been well placed.

We then come to the actual miracle in the story, the part that is familiar. However, we may not have taken notice of the details that we have in the narrative. There are six stone water jars nearby. What are they used for? For rites of purification. The jars are used to fill the pools that are used for ritual purification. That is all they would be used for, so that they could avoid becoming unclean. They used stone for the jars because it was harder for a stone jar to become unclean. But you wouldn't use them for putting wine in. But that is what is used to turn water into wine. There's a couple of different things that we can see here. One is that Jesus is upending the importance of ritual purity. For the sake of a friend, he ignores what those jars would be used for so that it can become what someone needs. In this way, it bucks tradition and rejects ritual purity. We can take this further in noting that there are six jars, with six being a number of incompleteness. Ritual purity itself is not enough to make one whole. However, those jars are filled to the brim and transformed. We can make another connection at this point. These jars were normally used for ritual purification so that one could be made clean and redeemed from ritual uncleanness. They are now used for wine, which we connect to the blood of Christ that redeems us from sin. We go from the waters of ritual purity to the blood of salvation. We are no longer washing away what makes us unclean, but we are removing sin. Those deeper layers continue to give us a deeper understanding of the sign.

But we can go further than that. At this point in the narrative, we have the jars filled with water and we are told to show them to the person in charge. We haven't actually yet been told that the water has become wine, but it is understood. The servants then take this wine over to the steward in charge of the celebration. We get another analogy at this point because the person in charge doesn't know where this wine has come from. He is in charge of the banquet, so he should know where the wine comes from. He is the one who should be planning accordingly to make sure that the wine doesn't run out. In this it seems that Mary and the servants all knew the wine ran out before the leadership. When he tastes the wine, he notes this is a reversal of customs. People normally serve the good wine first and use inferior wine later. Instead, this superior wine has come last. This reversal is a theme throughout the Gospels. The first has become last and the last has become first. Christ's ministry shows this reversal repeatedly. What was once revered is brought low and what was once low is revered. And what about his man in charge? He doesn't know where this wine has come from. We can see this as another analogy, one for the religious leaders and authorities. They cannot understand who Christ is. But the servants who filled the jars do know where the wine has come from, and in turn are the people who understand who Jesus is. The ones in charge are the last to know while the servants are first, the same reversal we see between the religious authorities and those who follow Christ. The last have become first and the first become last.

I think those are all things intentionally made part of the narrative to begin this journey to the cross. And it's easy to miss them when we only know the children's version of the story. Because we may not catch all of those details, all of those things that give us a deeper understanding of Christ. Because it changes this from just a story about water into wine into a narrative about Christ upending tradition and bringing true salvation to the world. It is about ending the idea of ritual purity and bringing a cleansing of sin. We see a reversal of fortune for those who believe. We see all of this wrapped up as part of a wedding in Cana. What fascinates me is that this happens all throughout the Gospels. This kind of symbolism is shown throughout Scripture. We often see the surface message and we don't' always get all of those deeper insights. Because we found all of this in just 11 verses of John. Think about how much more is there that we may not have seen. Think about the details that we may have overlooked. So, I encourage each of you to read again to look for those things you may have missed. That you read those familiar stories to see what details we may have missed. That you let your eyes read the story anew to find out what you may have never seen before. All so that we may grow in spirit and in truth. And may we discover new knowledge of Christ when we revisit those childhood stories with grown up eyes. And may we learn more deeply of our Savior's love. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Our Current Series – Back to School**

Our current series is going to be taking a look at lessons we may have learned in a children's Sunday School or Vacation Bible School. But did we learn everything about the story that we need to know? What more can we learn now as adults? Each week we take on a new lesson as we go back to school!

Next Week: Furnace of Fire.

For this message, we will be looking at the way that we can be blinded by anger and the problem with forcing others to share faith.

### **Prayer List**

Rev Angie Lee	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup	Ambulance Crew	Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Tricia Adkins
Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead	Lauren Stewart	Tom Finley
Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert
Phil Hawickhorst	Ray Carr	Alice Sherwood	Richard Durham
Kathy Hanks	Steve Carlen	Emily Blade	Tim Schnauz
Donna Carlen	Ernie Peters	Jess Shoot	Stanley Kiser
Corine Howard	Don Gilmore	Shirley Jester	Connie Brown
Marsha Overton	Linda Carlen	Michael Nichols	Paul Cox
Taylor Waldorf	Harriet Tucker	Becky McGuinness	Janet Yokum
Donna Farley	Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser
Larry Thompson	Evelyn Sue Icenogle	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte	Lavon Figgins	Kara Newton

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