

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today in our modern and advanced society, weddings are less about tradition and faith and more personalized...less about God blessing and more about the show. Couples are choosing to create ceremonies that reflect their personalities and their relationship rather than seeking God to bless their union. In our appointed Gospel lesson today we have a wedding, but what does this wedding before us in this lesson say about the personalities or the relationship of the couple who has been married?

According to our Gospel lesson, the focus is not on the personalities or the relationship of the couple. As a matter of fact, the bride is never mentioned, and the groom makes only a brief appearance with no spoken part at all in verse 9. We really have no details at all regarding this wedding. There is a verse that has details in this lesson, but the details have nothing to do with the people at the wedding.

Looking closer at this wedding and the lack of details, one might ask, why was Jesus, his unnamed mother, and the disciples at this event? Was the couple friends of Jesus or friends of His mother? Were the wedding couple friends of the disciples? Were they relatives of the disciples? Why is Jesus' mother nameless? And if she is nameless, why then is her role so pivotal in this wedding account? Moreover, why is *she* so worried about the wine?

Again, I call your attention to what we have seen happening in our Gospel lessons over the last few weeks, we should be cautious about assuming details about the lesson before us through other Gospels. There is ambiguity about this Gospel today, but this ambiguity is for a reason. Since the details are vague, the Gospel writers are perhaps suggesting we look closer at the transcendent intent of the story and less about the temporal details that are lacking in this wedding story.

Like our modern-day weddings that are focused on ourselves, we tend to also read and study scripture more or less in the same fashion, through the lens of our assumed self-righteousness. In other words, we tend to mold scripture into something we understand and something that will make me look good, instead of listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us through the Word about the will of God. What I mean in the case of this wedding is this, we seem to think that if we can fill in the blanks, or we can explain all the details of this wedding story, then we win and our "Biblical" knowledge is better than theirs, therefore we are correct, or more righteous than them.

What is that old saying...“the devil is in the details?” This would certainly explain this wedding in our Gospel today because the details of this wedding are its most problematic aspect. They become a problem because we want to be able to explain the details and in turn shift the focus from God to ourselves and what we figure out to fill in the blanks. The details of the wedding itself has little or even nothing at all to do with the point of the story...because if they did, John would have included them into the story. The wedding merely provides a setting for the miracle that takes place in it. The miracle and what it reveals about God is the focus and NOT the wedding itself.

This wedding appears only in the Gospel of John. In this particular Gospel, we have no birth narrative, we have no cozy Nativity scene, nor do we have wise men with gifts. What we have in

this Gospel is John identifying the power of Jesus Christ by reflecting back to the omnipotence of the Creator of the world with the words from Genesis, “In the beginning.”

^{1:1} In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He was in the beginning with God. ³ All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being ⁴ in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. ⁵ The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. (John 1:1-5, 14, 16)

The Word was with God and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh and lived among us...and because of this, we have received grace upon grace...and we have received it abundantly. According to John’s Gospel, the “Word” suggests divine communication not directly *from* God to us, but rather, God speaking to us in the human form of Jesus Christ. To be sure, Christ is the means through which the will of the Father is communicated. And we have a mere glimpse of God through the miracles that the Word in human flesh, Jesus Christ sets up for us. But even the miracles cannot capture the fullness of God’s magnificence, we are still left with some ambiguity and that ambiguity becomes even more cloudier when we attempt to clear it all up with our human self-righteousness explanations.

The first eleven chapters of John’s Gospel are often referred to as the “Book of Signs” because we hear in these chapters about the public ministry of Jesus as He traveled to and from Galilee and Judea performing miracles, teaching, and publicly engaging His adversaries.¹ And in these travels what Jesus reveals about himself He is actually revealing God to us, or we can say the Word made flesh is communicating God and or God’s will to us and for us.

So, before us today, Jesus is turning water into wine, and a great deal of wine at that. But when looking at this miracle in comparison to the other six miracles in this Gospel, we may conclude that this one really is not that significant and perhaps not that important. We may not understand this miracle as significant because we understand the general pattern of a miracle as something that meets a human need with miraculous divine provision and this miracle of wine is not really a human need in the sense that it doesn’t serve the desperately sick, the blind...it doesn’t heal a seriously disabled man, it doesn’t feed hungry crowds, and it doesn’t raise the dead.² How can this abundance of wine stand up to these other miracles?

In our attempt to answer this, we might fill in the blanks of the wedding story in order to find an outcome that we are comfortable with, an outcome that suites us. We may then conclude that this act of changing water to wine is simply intended to keep a party going with, by my calculations, about 180 gallons of wine or about 900 bottles of wine. And from what we are told about this wedding, it is well in progress when the wine runs out...even knowing that weddings of this time

¹ Portions of this paragraph and the prior paragraph are from an article entitled, *Miracles of Jesus in the Gospel of John*, by Blair G. Van Dyke, at <https://rsc.byu.edu/vol-9-no-3-2008/miracles-jesus-gospel-john>

² Van Harn, Roger E. *The Lectionary Commentary Theological Exegesis for Sunday’s Texts, The Third Readings: Gospels*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001. The commentary based on the appointed Gospel reading for the Second Sunday after the Epiphany, Year C, John 2:1-11, commentary by Richard Bauchham, page 489.

period went on for days, and we know this wedding has been going on for a while...do they really need all of this wine?

But as I said at the start, we tend to want answers and if they are not in the text, we seek answers from other sources like other Gospels or our own assumptions...and in doing so, we end up chasing our own tail and we've learned nothing about God. I did mention at the outset of this sermon that there are details in the story. Looking then at this miracle closer the only real details that we have in this story are the details about the stone water jars that contain the water that is turned to wine. John tells us the details this way:

⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

These water jars used for purification are stone and not earthen or clay because the stone jars are free from the possibility of Levitical impurity. Now we can look at this detail and say that the wine from these jars is the same wine that is the blood of Christ that cleanses us from our sinful impurity...but I have to ask, why then the wedding with very little or no details?

I suspect John is leaving out the details of the people getting married, their relationship with each other and the attendees, and the party itself in order for us to look closer...NOT at this wedding but rather, look closer at the meaning of a wedding...the celebration of a love that binds together two as one. If we look then at this Gospel lesson that is set in a wedding and look closer at the other lessons before us today, we DO NOT find answers for the party, but we can begin to see that this wedding reaches beyond Cana of Galilee...and goes deeper into the heart of a wedding and into what inspires a wedding...love.

From the prophet Isaiah we hear this today:

⁴ You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married. ⁵ For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. (Isaiah 62:4-5)

From the Psalm we hear:

⁵ Your love, O LORD,
reaches to the heavens,
and your faithfulness to the clouds.
⁷ How priceless is your love, O God!
Your people take refuge under the shadow of your wings.
⁸ They feast upon the abundance of your
house; you give them drink
from the river of your delights.
⁹ For with you is the well of life,
and in your light we see light. (Psalm 36:7-9)

From the ambiguity of the wedding we are reminded of the abundance of God's love for us and that love that is manifest in Jesus Christ who is the Word, the communication, the announcement,

the interaction of God's love for us...a love that like the wine is given in abundance...a wine that shows us grace upon grace.

Let us not forget that in Christian theology, the church is the bride and Jesus is the bridegroom. This is the metaphor used to describe the intimate relationship between Christ and us, the church. The miracle before us today is an astounding act that takes something as ordinary as water and turns it into something extraordinary and does so abundantly for no real reason or need...it is grace upon grace. And this happens in a setting where love is the ethos of the gathering, love is proclaimed, and love is what binds that wedding party and us to God. And in this wedding gathering taking place in this Gospel lesson, and in this gathering this day as well, we see God's love poured out abundantly and extraordinarily in the grace upon grace given in the wine set before us in this Holy Eucharist, a wine that purifies each one of us before God.

This miracle reveals the power of God's love in the action of Jesus Christ in the midst of a gathering...the power to change things and to do it all in an abundant way. This miracle reveals Christ's power to not only change water to wine, but to change our sin into His righteousness...change our view from our perspective to a greater depth or a broader view. This miracle is directing us to consider the bond we have with God in the revelation and the significance of Jesus Christ as our savior and the divine love that brings salvation to you...to me...to you all... and brings that love in an abundance of grace...

in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.