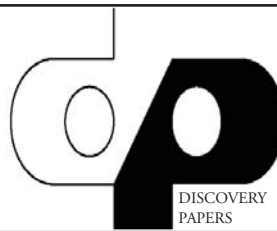


WINE FOR A WEDDING FEAST

SERIES: PORTRAITS JOHN PAINTED



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John 2:1-12
1st Message
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On the screen behind me is a royal couple. Someday they will be king and queen of England. William and Kate were married on April 29, 2011, an event witnessed by two billion people; the most viewers in television history. The wedding cost \$70 million. The guest list, of course, was filled with celebrities and VIPs of all kinds.

Here is another picture of a royal couple. They are children of God who reign with Christ. Tery and Carol were married in this church a month after Kate and William. Carol Lind (who served on our pastoral staff for many years) is now Carol Hursh. Their wedding was a bit less formal than the royal wedding in London. In fact Carol got to hold her ten month old granddaughter during part of the wedding ceremony. The event was not televised and cost a good deal less than \$70 million. No celebrities attended, with one exception, the gratefully acknowledged presence of Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth.

Weddings are both wonderful and important. They are occasions to declare our deepest convictions about both God and ourselves. A wedding allows us to connect to the past, to celebrate the present, and to look to the future in hope.

We are going to consider a New Testament text this morning that also features Jesus as a wedding guest, although his power and generosity were little noticed at the time. The festivities occur at Cana in Galilee and the Lord provided wine for the wedding feast.

A Nine Week Series: *Portraits John Painted*

This message is the first in a series on the personal encounters of Jesus in the Book of John. These stories have a particular intimacy about them. John is, for many, the best loved of the four New Testament biographies of Jesus. It was written after the other three, adding an awareness of Jesus' personality to the previous accounts of his words and deeds. Ray Stedman says this about the gospel of John:

John was the closest intimate of our Lord during the days of His ministry, and the tone of the writing reflects the bond of friendship between John and the Lord. That is why this book has often been referred to

as the intimate gospel. . . . Out of the deep reservoir of his memories and through his deep connection with the Holy Spirit, John was able to set down his unique and intensely personal story of the life of his Friend and Lord, Jesus.¹

The series is titled, *Portraits John Painted*—an examination of detailed, intimate stories recorded in the fourth gospel.

John wrote what he remembered as a tribute to his beloved Friend. But he also wrote with an apostolic purpose, which he declares at the end of the book, “Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:30-31).

“These are written” to persuade you to believe that Jesus is who he says he is; that he is the Christ, the Son of God; that he deserves our allegiance, our worship, and our obedience. “These are written” so that we might have life in his name; eternal, abundant, meaningful, rich, and overflowing life. May John's portraits become signposts leading to abundant life for us.

Turning to the wedding at Cana (chapter two), there are three perspectives that can shape what we learn. First is the perspective of the couple, the guests, and the banquet master. Second is the view of the disciples and third is that of Jesus' mother.

John 2:1-11:

¹On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ²and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, “They have no more wine.” ⁴“Dear woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.” ⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

(We might note in passing that Mary's directive

here is good advice for every person in every setting.)

‘Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” They did so, ⁹and 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 ¹⁰and 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.” ¹¹This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

The Wedding Goers

Many of us at some time or other have been connected to the planning of a wedding—your own or helping a family member or friend. Details, decisions, uncertainties, and expense all take their toll. It is a big deal to plan a wedding. It always has been. In the wedding before us in John 2 the preparations proved inadequate. Without a remedy the newlyweds would have been shamed. But, Jesus was there. He chose to intervene with miraculous power as an act of love for a young couple beginning their life together.

Yet, his actions went beyond solving a problem. He was making a statement about himself in this event—he insisted on fullness of joy. He made 150-180 gallons of wine! The guests would never be able to drink so much wine. In open vats it would turn to vinegar before it was all consumed.

It was excellent wine, remarked on by the master of ceremonies who had been in such settings before. There is a saying of the rabbis, that ‘without wine there is no joy.’ The Old Testament is clear that wine is a symbol of the exuberant presence of God. Wine reminds us of the goodness, overflow, and delight of God in the world he made, and in the people he loves. Jesus is firmly declaring himself to be in favor of love, laughter, and connection; dancing, family, and friendship. His first miracle establishes

the priority of joy.

To be candid, evangelical Christians are not generally seen as champions of exuberance. We are more likely to be perceived as wet blankets who are worried that enjoyment of life will lead to problems. But whatever our reputation, our responsibility is to follow Jesus. What lessons can we learn from the Lord about joy?

First, the blessings of God often precede anybody’s recognition of them. The wedding guests in Cana were beneficiaries of a miracle they were unaware of. God is often good to us before we know it. One of the responsibilities of Christian discipleship is to call attention to the generosity and goodness of God.

Leslie and I joined some friends for a dessert on the 4th of July then walked over to a hill in a park near our home to sit and watch fireworks. A warm night, energetic little ones, friends and neighbors, brilliant colors in the sky—all of these combined to create a beautiful experience. Walking home I began to count blessings—American citizenship, the gift of eyesight and the ability to perceive colors, laughing children, and shared experience with good friends. It is a privilege to offer thanks to the Giver of good gifts, to offer praise where it is due. But there are many who feel a burden of gratitude and don’t know who to thank.

Yosemite is spectacular this year, by all accounts. Cute children steal our hearts. A loving pet lifts our spirits. Unexpected success drives away the blues. These suggest a response of gratitude, but how and where can we speak our appreciation?

The master of ceremonies at the wedding had this question. Who should be thanked for the exquisite wine? Someone deserves praise and thanks. Jesus pours out blessing—our responsibility is to point to him.

I remember a conversation I had with my mother who came to faith in her forties. She said in effect,

I didn’t feel like a terrible sinner. I didn’t hate my life. I wasn’t someone who was crawling out of the darkness hoping for the light. But, I spent most of my life knowing that I had been given more than I deserved, and finally somebody told me that God was more than a distant, divine power, that He was a person who would receive my prayers—He was someone to whom I could offer thanks.

This awareness and these prayers led to her salvation.

A second lesson we might learn in this text is that joy is not a passing emotion. Jesus' wonderful gifts encourage us to put our faith in him. Ben Patterson wrote this about joy:

Christian joy is anchored in the facts of faith to be trusted no matter the circumstances: Christ has come, Christ has died, Christ is risen and coming again. My sins are forgiven, my hope is sure. As the Heidelberg Catechism states, "I belong body and soul, in life and in death" to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.²

Because these things are true, my ability to perceive beauty and wonder and delight is not lost when circumstances are painful.

Aware of the dangers of fleshly temptation we sometimes fail to advocate or experience overflowing joy. The problem with fleshly excess and cheap thrills, is not that they are fun; it is that they are false. They fade and leave emptiness and ruin behind. Joy is God's gift and it is at the center of Jesus' first miracle.

The Disciples' Lesson

Jesus changed water to wine and established the priority of joy. His disciples learned an additional lesson this day.

John 2:11:

This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

These disciples had been with him only briefly. They had been followers of John the Baptist who pointed them to Jesus. This was the first of the signs that should lead to belief and to life in his name. They saw glory, his glory revealed. They began to put their faith in him.

It is remarkable, however, that the first of these signs was done at Cana in Galilee . . . not Jerusalem, not Alexandria, and not Rome. The wedding wasn't televised, no two billion viewers, no breathless media commentary. Cana was nowhere. It was bumpkin country. Cana was a nothing town in a nowhere place.

The gospel of John starts with an extraordinary description of Jesus. It tells us of the word who was with God, who was God, who became flesh, and the light of the world. The devil tempted him to make a dramatic, eye-grabbing display of his glory yet Jesus' first sign occurred

in a humble location, for the sake of young people in need; a miracle only a few even realized had occurred.

So what did the disciples learn? They learned of his care for ordinary people; that he was not going to pass by folks in Galilee who needed him in order to be some place more important. Perhaps they also began to learn that their world view was false and their hearts would need to be changed. If Jesus was (as John the Baptist indicated) the promised Messiah then his path to power was not going to depend on fame, money, and military strength. Their ambitions for greatness would have to be transformed. They saw his glory, but it was not what they expected.

The Lesson for Mary

Finally, we ask what Mary learned. The disciples, who were following Jesus, didn't yet know very much about him. They were learning for the first time who he was. The wedding goes had no reason to pay him any mind. But Mary knew a lot! Consider the conversation in verses 3-4. Jesus' mother said to him they have no more wine, and he responded,

"Dear woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come.

He is not being rude to his mother, but he is not being affectionate either. He is respectful, but he is holding up his hand. Having begun his public ministry Jesus can no longer give priority to the needs of his mother and siblings. The world for her will never be the same. "Dear woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come." I will act on your request, but I will do so on my terms.

Perhaps Mary cast back to Gabriel's announcement of his holy mission or to Simeon's prediction of a sword that would pierce her heart. Jesus will never have a wedding in Galilee, father her grandchildren, and welcome her into his home in her old age. He is going to be lost to her in all of those ways. She has to give him up. She must relinquish her maternal claim and become his disciple, calling him Lord on the same basis as everyone else.

Further, his reference to a coming hour was a prediction of his death, and whether she could admit it to herself or not, Mary knew this too. The wine at this wedding feast establishes the priority of joy, but it also anticipates his blood poured out for us.

Conclusion

Jesus' first sign, displaying his glory, occurred in an obscure place for the sake of no one important and was missed by most of those who benefited from the miracle. Jesus' lordship was established in humility.

The overflow of excellent wine means that God intends his children to rejoice and we must refuse 'religious' objections to love and laughter.

Finally, we recognize that all of Jesus' teaching and all his works of power point forward to the hour that has not yet come, when his life will be forfeited so that we might have life.

May God use this tender, intimate story to change us, so that we may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing we may have life in his name.

NOTES

¹Ray C. Stedman, *God's Loving Word* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Discovery House Publishers, 1993), 12,14.

²Ben Patterson, *He Has Made Me Glad* (Downers Grove, Illinois: University Press, 2005), 26.