

The Wedding at Cana
John 2:1 – 12
Fairview Evangelical Presbyterian Church
March 5, 2017

Introduction: When things go wrong at a wedding

On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.
² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out...

One of the essential functions of pre-marital counseling is to help the engaged couple to focus upon the right questions. The couple is in love, their families are excited, and celebrations are being anticipated. In this context it is the pastor's job in the counseling to help the couple look not to the wedding, but to the marriage. The pre-marital counseling should have a life-long horizon and seek to help the couple to lay a firm foundation for a life together as husband and wife.

Typically, the last session is the only one in which I talk specifically about the details of the wedding ceremony. I always tell the couple: *'Things often go wrong at a wedding: a bridesmaid trips walking up the chancel steps; the flower girl loses her courage to walk down the aisle alone; the best man misplaces the wedding rings. Whatever may go wrong at your wedding, relax and don't worry about it. God has a wonderful way of turning our mistakes into great blessings and joys in our lives. In the years to come, when you tell the story of your wedding day, you will always tell the mistakes, the flubs and the things you didn't plan or intend. As time goes by, those things, the mistakes, the things that went wrong, will become some of your favorite memories of the day. So, whatever may go wrong, relax and simply enjoy the day.'*

The truth of my words is born out in the story before us, of Jesus and his disciples' presence at the wedding in the small town of Cana. We do not know the name of the couple who were married. We do not know the name of the priest who officiated. We are not told any of the ceremonies that were observed, promises made, rings exchanged or gifts given. The one thing we know about this wedding is the thing that went wrong: they ran out of wine. To the couple's enduring chagrin, the only thing about their wedding remembered in history, is the faux pas of their failure to sufficiently plan ahead for the celebration. Among the lessons we can learn from this story: running out of wine at a wedding celebration is a crisis of such magnitude that it warrants miraculous divine intervention. ☺

There are many lessons which can be learned from this story of the Lord Jesus' first miracle. First, from Mary, we learn to take our problems to Jesus.

From Mary we learn to take our problems to Jesus

³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

We can make some educated assumptions regarding this story permitting us to see behind the scenes, to discern some details which John does not explicitly tell us. The first is to note Mary's manner, and the fact that she adopts a take charge attitude in seeking to solve the problem of the absent wine. Mary's initiative, together with the fact that Jesus' presence on the invitation list *included* his disciples, suggests that the hosts of the wedding were family relations. Family ties brought Jesus, Mary and the disciples to this celebration. This family connection would explain Mary's ownership of the crisis. It tells us why she would bring the knowledge of the crisis to her son Jesus. Families come together when predicament and embarrassment threaten.

The question of authority in the dialog between Mary and Jesus is very important. I am sure that Mary approached Jesus with the knowledge of this need and in doing so she presumed her authority over her son as his mother. This is not unreasonable. This is what mother's do, right? Each of us can think of times when our own mothers have approached us with a need, an instruction, a request or a 'suggestion' – offered in that motherly tone which makes clear that it is a 'suggestion' in name only. The appeal is based upon their natural, God-given influence over us as our mother. Mary approaches Jesus on the basis of her motherly authority over him.

It is for this reason that Jesus' reply is so significant. Mary appeals to him as '*mother*.' Jesus replies to her as '*woman*.' Jesus is not being rude. His usage of the word in this manner was polite and appropriate. Yet his words do suggest a relational distance. Mary did not possess a special status nor possess a special claim upon his authority in the work of his ministry. His answer to her request is as it might be to any other bringing a request to him: she is '*woman*,' not '*mother*.'

Jesus is about to perform his first miracle. John tells us that in this miracle of turning water into wine the Lord '*manifested his glory*.' Indeed he did, for this was to be a miracle of great weight and magnitude. This miracle marks the beginning of Jesus' preaching, teaching, and healing ministry. Jesus performs this miracle for his own reasons, according to his own purposes in the inauguration of his ministry, and not in response to any special entreaty or obligation to his mother or family.

Jesus' mild rebuke of Mary must be understood to apply in regard to her claim for special status upon his redemptive work and ministry. Mary has no special place in the redemptive work of Jesus or in the salvation offered by God. Mary did, however, retain a special place in the life of the Lord Jesus in regards to his *humanity*. His duty toward her as a son's duty toward his mother never changed. This is why the Lord Jesus, when he was upon the cross, took notice of Mary and placed her under the care of his disciple John. Jesus knew that it was the obligation of a son, any son, to care for his parents in their old age. This responsibility fell to Jesus as Mary's oldest son. On the cross our Lord remembered this obligation and discharged it faithfully. In regards to his humanity, Mary possessed the same claim that any mother may possess regarding her son,

while in regards to his divine ministry, Mary's place was that of any other mother, any other woman – a sinner in need of redemption as we all.

All that being said, Mary's most important contribution in this story is her example: she takes the need to Jesus. Running out of wine at the wedding celebration constitutes a family crisis. As Christian families, we all face various trials and challenges in life. Mary's example teaches us to take our problems to the Lord Jesus.

You may be thinking: "That is obvious, Pastor Mark." And it is. But I also notice a sad and recurring pattern in the lives of some Christian believers. When trial, trouble and difficulty come, they pull back. They separate themselves from Christ, from the community of the church. They think that they must weather the hurt and challenge on their own. When trial and difficulties come, that is when we most need to turn to Christ, to lean upon his people, his church.

Mary's example teaches us to bring our problems to Jesus. She also teaches us to obey the Lord's instructions, even when we may not comprehend why we should do so.

Mary also teaches us to obey the Lord Jesus' instructions, even though we may not comprehend why we should do so. – v. 5

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

Mark Twain once quipped that '*faith is believing what you know ain't so.*' Humorous though it is, that, of course, is not quite right. Faith is not an opponent of knowledge but is its partner. Faith acknowledges our finiteness, our limitedness. We do not see all the possibilities. We do not comprehend all the reasons. Often in life we must step out on faith: acting and behaving in a manner which may not be entirely reasonable but which we are sure is right and proper.

One way in which we know what is right and proper, even when we lack complete knowledge or sufficient reason, is through authority. I recall when I was a child and my mom might give me an instruction to do some particular thing and I would ask, '*why?*' My mother would then answer, '*because I told you so.*' She made an appeal to her authority over me as my mother. Obedience was expected, not because I knew all the reasons, but because her authority over me as my mother required my obedience.

Proper obedience to authority is a means by which we learn to see the power and presence of God in our lives. Each of us must learn to be obedient to God in areas of our lives which, at the onset, we do not and probably cannot comprehend why God would ask us to do such a thing. Jesus tells us that we are to pray for our enemies. Do you think anyone in their natural state can find

sufficient reason why they ought to do such a thing? Jesus tells us that if someone compels us to walk with them one mile, volunteer to go with them a second mile as well. Is there any way we can know, as we contemplate the first step of that second mile, why Jesus would have us do this? Of course not! We will learn the Lord's purpose for us in our obedience to his command.

That afternoon at the wedding at Cana the Lord tells the servants of the household to fill the six stone jars with water. These were not crock pots. These jars were large, used to fill the mikvah – ceremonial bath – for the rites of Jewish ritual purification. The filling of them meant carrying between 120 and 180 gallons of water. It was a big job. Jesus does not give the servants a reason for his instruction. He does not hint at what he intends to do. Their job as servants was obedience to the Lord's command.

That, of course, is our job as well. We are to be faithful servants, obedient to the Lord Jesus' commands. We are to go the extra mile. We are to forgive those who offend us. We are to look for ways to be a blessing to our enemies. We are to be thankful in all things. We may not know why the Lord gives us these commands, but our job is to obey them.

From Mary we learn to take our problems to Jesus. Relatedly, we must be obedient to our Lord's instruction, even if we do not see why we should be so or what benefit might flow from our obedience. Next, we see in this story that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the hopes and expectations of the Old Testament.

From Jesus we learn that he is the fulfillment of all the hopes and expectations and promises of the Old Testament. – v. 6 – 9, 11

⁶Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. ⁹When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now."

This first miracle of Jesus, turning water into wine, is a miracle of its own right. But it is also symbolic. There is a great deal of spiritual symbolism in the events at Cana. Travel to modern Israel and visit the many archeological sites to be found there. One thing found repeatedly in the archeological excavations are mikvahs: Jewish ritual baths. A mikvah is easy to identify and, even as tourist, you can begin to quickly pick them out. A mikvah is a ritual bath, with steps, usually seven, descending into the water. A mikvah enabled full immersion in the water. The stone jars that were used by Jesus in this miracle were used in the Jewish rituals of purification. They were used to fill the mikvah. The purpose of purification was to make sure that a Jewish worshipper was ceremonially clean and therefore permitted to come into God's presence in worship.

It is helpful to note that there are six stone jars. In Biblical numerology six is the number for man. Six is the number of sinfulness and of the need for purification. At the beginning of the encounter at Cana, these jars are empty. Their emptiness shows the inability of humans, in our own power, to cleanse ourselves from sin. Jesus instructs that the jars be filled with water. Once filled with water, the stone jars now symbolize Judaism with its rites and ceremonies. Normally the water would have been poured into a mikvah. But, in this story, we learn something important. Judaism is the shadow. It is the hope. It is the promise. In these ways, Judaism is a very good thing. However, it is Jesus Christ who brings the fulfillment of what is promised. It is Jesus who has the power and authority to turn the water into wine. The wine fulfills the water. Jesus is the one who purifies. He is the one who fulfills the purpose of the jars. Jesus is the one who turns the ordinary into the extraordinary.

When the wine-turned-to-water is brought to the steward of the feast he declares his surprise at the quality of the wine he has just been served. It is the richest and best wine. There is a contrast between the good and the less good. The presence of the good wine, as the result of Jesus miracle, is indication that he is the fulfillment. He is the best. He is the culmination. All that is promised and hoped in the Old Testament finds its fulfillment and meaning in relationship to him. The best wine has been preserved until now, until the coming of Jesus Christ.

From Mary we learn to take our problems to Jesus. She also teaches us that we must be obedient to our Lord's instruction, even if we do not know exactly why. We see in this miracle that Jesus is the fulfillment of all the hopes and expectations of the Old Testament. Next, Jesus' signs reveal his glory and promote belief.

Jesus' signs reveal his glory and promote belief – v. 11

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.

Note the sequence: 1) Jesus performs the miracle of turning water into wine; 2) reveals his glory; and 3) the disciples place their faith in him. It is by the miracle that Jesus' divine authority and majesty is revealed. Until this point in the gospel of John, it has been the witness of John the Baptist that has pointed to the truth of the significance of Jesus Christ. Now, it is the witness of the miracle that will point to the truth and significance of Jesus Christ. In chapter 1:14 John declared that he had '*beheld His glory.*' John, the gospel writer, was among those who saw the miracles take place, the manifestation of Jesus Christ's power and authority over time and nature.

John calls the miracles he writes of in his gospel '*signs.*' A sign points to something. It gives direction. What is the direction of the signs Jesus performs? What is it to which they point? The signs, the miracles, confirm Jesus' authority. They testify to the fact that he has come from God and carries God's blessing and approval. The signs establish Jesus Christ's authority. As the Pharisee, Nicodemus

says to Jesus: we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.” The miracles establish the authority of the one who performs them.

This is why, in the Bible, miracle stories are always closely tied to the person who performs them. The first miracles told by the Bible do not occur until the person of Moses. God speaks to Moses out of the Burning Bush, instructing him to go to the people of Israel and lead them out of slavery in Egypt. Moses asks a very important question of God in the midst of this dialog. “How will they know that you in fact have sent me to them?” God give Moses two signs. First, he tells Moses to put his hand in his cloak. Moses does so. God tells him to pull it out again. Moses does, and sees that his hand has become leprous. God then tells Moses to reverse the sequence. He does, and his hand is clean. Next God tells Moses to throw his wooden staff on the ground. Moses obeys and the staff becomes a living serpent. God tells him to take the serpent by the tail and when Moses does so it becomes a wooden staff again. These are miracles Moses performs before the Israelite people and thereby confirm his authority in their eyes as one who has been sent by God. These signs, of course, are only the beginning. God confirms Moses’ authority as the lawgiver of the ancient Israelites through the Ten Plagues, the parting of the Red Sea, the Pillar of Fire, the Manna in the wilderness, the water from the rock and more. Moses is a great miracle worker because it is upon his work and leadership that the Jewish nation is birthed, its laws written and its worship established. Until the coming of Jesus Christ, Moses’ authority is unequalled in the Bible. Jesus’ authority is greater than Moses and, for this reason, the signs he did were also greater.

It is for this reason that there are no modern miracle workers. Modern magicians may walk through walls or make tigers appear or disappear, but they make it clear that theirs is the art of illusion, not reality. Faith Healer’s may claim to lengthen legs but any good chiropractor can do the same thing. I am not denying the reality, sincerity, or the legitimacy of prayers for healing. God does bring healing. It is through prayer that we bring our needs and concerns to Jesus. But there are no miracle workers today like Moses or Jesus. Nobody today can turn water into wine, raise the dead, or feed thousands with a couple of anchovies and a few loaves of pita bread. I am not saying that there are no miracles today. What I am saying is that there are no modern miracle workers. The fullness has been revealed. Miracles occur because God hears the prayers of his people and by his grace may work in our lives in a manner that is inexplicable on a human level. But no matter how great the apparent miracle, there will always be the apparent lingering possibility of a natural explanation: perhaps the doctor read the x-ray wrong; maybe the lab made a mistake in its analysis; perhaps it was all just a coincidence. This is the way it should be, for we are called to walk by faith, not by sight. God is at work in our midst. He hears the prayers of his people. He still does great and marvelous things. But his hand is discerned by the eyes of faith.

Close

And his disciples believed in him.

Let me close by asking a question: "Do you believe in Jesus?"

From Mary, we learn to take our need to Jesus. She also reminds us to do what the Lord calls us to do, even if the reasons for doing so seem unclear. The miracle of the water into wine teaches us that Jesus brings the fulfillment. All that the Old Testament promised and pointed to is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Seeing the sign, the miracle, his disciples believed. They placed their faith in Christ. They were drawn to him. They believed. The five disciples who were accompanying Jesus placed their faith in him.

The same opportunity and invitation is yours today. I invite you to follow the example of the disciples and trust in Christ, believe in him, turn to him. He is the one who gives true cleansing from sin. He is the one who fulfills our hopes and dreams, meets all our needs, and gives eternal life.

Say 'Amen' Somebody

John 2:1 -12

2 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

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¹² After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.