

THE CANA MIRACLE TODAY
JOHN 2: 1-11; 1 CORINTHIANS 12: 1-11
SECOND SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME
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1 Corinthians 12: 1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. 4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

Psalm 36: 5-10

⁵*Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.*

⁶*Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O LORD. ⁷How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. ⁸They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.*

⁹*For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. ¹⁰O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your salvation to the upright of heart!*

How precious is God's love. According to the psalmist, we feast on God's abundance. God provides drink from the river of delights. God is the fountain of life. Why then, should we be surprised that the first sign of Jesus, his first miracle according to the Gospel of John, was the changing of water into wine? Joy, abundance and the every day blessings of life come to us in Jesus Christ. Listen to the Good News from **John 2: 1-11**.

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 9 When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10 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." 11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Thanks be to God for this holy Word. Please pray with me. Holy God, blessed Savior, we give thanks for your Living Word, Jesus Christ. We give thanks for the abundant blessings you shower upon us every

day. Like many at the wedding in Cana, we often do not notice. We take your gifts for granted. Sometimes we do not see the abundance around us. Open our hearts and minds to hear your word to us today. Inspire us by the Holy Spirit to use the gifts you have given to bless others and share the Good News we have received. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, for you are our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

In the early church and in some churches today, Christ's miracle at Cana is celebrated as the Epiphany of the Lord on January 6. Some say that the miracle was recorded and celebrated to counter the Feast of the Greek god Dionysius held January 5 and 6. Legends claimed that water in the temple of Dionysius changed into wine (Lectionary Homiletics, January 14, 2001, 11). The Greek celebration was one of revelry, drunkenness and immoral behavior.

In contrast the epiphany of Jesus at Cana was a family affair. The water of purification became the wine of communion with Christ at a wedding. Christians believe God blesses the wedding of a man and a woman. God blesses family gatherings. Just as Christmas replaced the pagan celebration of the Sun god Zeus, so, too, perhaps the epiphany at a wedding feast provided an appropriate alternative to a drunken pagan festival. Christ's sign at the wedding feast, however, was far more than a pagan counterpoint.

The town of Cana was located about ten miles north of Nazareth. The only time Cana is mentioned in the New Testament is in the Gospel of John. Although Cana itself is seemingly insignificant, the gospel writer used it as a location to mark the beginning of Christ's ministry (Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 1, 261). I encourage us to read the first four chapters of John this afternoon and reflect on the larger message of the section that begins and ends in Cana. First Jesus changed water into wine at a wedding feast. Next Jesus threw the moneychangers out of the temple in Jerusalem and spoke of his body as a temple (2: 13-25). Jesus challenged Nicodemus to be born from above (3: 1-21). He offered living water to a Samaritan woman. Then Jesus returned to Cana and gave life to the son of a royal official, a gentile who believed (4: 1-45). *These things are written so that... you may have life (20:31)*, the gospel writer tells us. Jesus ushered in the kingdom of God. Jesus brought life, a vibrant new life symbolized by over 100 gallons of wine at a wedding, in contrast to an old religious order that was dull and running out. God provides abundance and joy in Christ, and the promise of his ministry was first revealed at a wedding in Cana.

In his book The Life of Jesus for Today, Ron Allen says the fourth gospel is based on a dualism between spheres of existence, in contrast to the dualistic history presented in the other three gospels (Lectionary Homiletics, January 17, 2010, 56). Instead of suggesting God divided history chronologically into the pre-Christ evil age followed by a new age with Christ, the Gospel of John divides reality between a sphere that knows God (heaven) and a sphere that does not know God (the world or in Greek the kosmos) (Lectionary Homiletics, January 14, 2001).

Allen suggests that we might think of John's dualism as the floors of a department store (Lectionary Homiletics, January 17, 2010, 56). Heaven is found on the top floors with all the best merchandise, whereas the world is on the lower floors and the basement filled with damaged and second-rate goods. The upper floors are filled with love, light, truth, freedom and abundance. The lower floors are full of hatred, darkness, falsehood, slavery and scarcity.

Before Jesus came, people had a vague but incomplete sense of the upper sphere. God sent Jesus down from heaven to reveal the possibility of experiencing heaven in a partial way even while continuing to live in the world (John 3:16). According to the Gospel of John, "Those who believe in Jesus live in a bubble of heaven in the middle of the world. At death, they follow the way opened by Jesus into the full and complete sphere of heaven" (Lectionary Homiletics, January 17, 2010, 56).

For the writer of John, Judaism contained a second-rate awareness of God. Like the jars of water for purification at the wedding, Judaism could not provide the joy and abundant life God wants to give people. The miracle at Cana was a sign that Jesus transforms the ordinary water of life into a vibrant and sparkling wine of celebration and communion with God.

I would be remiss if I did not address the issue of alcohol. In the first century, wine was a common drink. Water was often impure and unsuitable for drinking. Wine generally was 3 parts water and two parts wine, so it was not as strong as our wines today. Biblical interpretation often requires an understanding of differing historical and cultural contexts. In no way does the miracle at Cana associate Christ and Christians with the improper use of alcohol.

People also have raised questions about the conversation between Jesus and his mother. Was Jesus being rude? The Gospel of John does not mention Mary's name. Referring to his mother as "woman" was not a sign of rudeness, but respect. Scholars have debated the meaning of the conversation. Mary was concerned because the wine was running out. Jesus asked why it should be their concern.

My son has made those kinds of observations for years. Why do we have to clean everything just because company is coming? Why should he have to go to the store because we don't have enough celery for the dressing? Like Mary, I have learned how to approach things with my son. On Christmas Eve when we arrived at the church, there were leaves scattered around the narthex because of the wind. Rather than asking John, I got the church vacuum and begin vacuuming the carpet. Soon John offered to take over the task. He accomplished something he likely would not have noticed unless I raised the issue.

Mary was a remarkable woman for many reasons, but I respect her concern for others and her willingness to lift up her concerns to the will of God. Mary told the servants to do what Jesus asked, but she did not direct her son. She trusted Jesus and she trusted God.

At first Jesus said his hour had not come, a phrase he used later to refer to his death. Mary's faithfulness once again provided an opportunity for God's revelation in Jesus Christ. Physically she gave him birth. Now at a wedding feast, Mary helped birth his ministry.

There are many more questions we might raise about this scripture passage. If you want to discuss the passage further, feel free to visit with me after worship. If you are not already in a small group Bible study, I hope you will consider joining one of our discipleship hour classes or one of the other small groups that are meeting this week. There is so much to learn from God's Word. We learn from each other.

One of the lessons from our gospel passage comes from Mary. We, too, may be called to raise concerns and encourage others to use their gifts to address a need. Like Jesus, we all should question whether a need is of particular concern to us and whether God is calling us to use our gifts for a particular purpose.

Jesus' initial response has been characterized as the "scandal of divine reluctance," but discernment about how to use our time, talents and resources according to God's will is essential to faithful discipleship (Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 1, 261). Sometimes we must say no to others in order to say yes to God. The Holy Spirit will guide us.

An awareness of God's work in the world is also essential. Most of the people at the wedding, including the groom and the wine steward, were unaware that a miracle had occurred, let alone that Jesus accomplished the miracle. Think about it. Those who benefitted most from the miracle did not have a

clue. For the disciples, Jesus changing the water into wine was a sign from God. Because of the sign, the disciples believed in Jesus, but most people were oblivious. The same is true today.

What about us? Have miracles occurred and we failed to notice? C.S. Lewis wrote that miracles are part of God's continuing creativity, a creativity that we experience every day (Lewis, "Miracles" in God in the Dock, in Pulpit Resource, January 14, 2001, 9).

As I was reading about the wedding at Cana, I thought about my son's wedding last July. There is no way I could have pulled it off without you and God. You washed windows, planted flowers and directed traffic. My office looked better than it ever has before or since. You took pictures, provided refreshments and lavished my son and Megan with love, presents and good wishes.

Were there miracles? You bet. The church ordered new chairs. We hoped to have them by Easter, but they did not come. The chairs were made in China. We could not control the shipping schedule. The chairs arrived the evening of the wedding rehearsal. The men set them up while we left for dinner. There was a lot of sweat equity in making things happen, but we had 407 people in this sanctuary for the wedding, a fact that should not be shared with the fire marshal. Everyone found a parking place. Everyone had a chair. We were comfortable even though it was a hot summer evening.

Now you might think a wedding miracle is trivial, but it was not trivial to me or to my son. It was one of many miracles I have experienced as a disciple of Jesus Christ. The signs I have seen in my life and heard about from others, including many of you, lift me up. The signs of God at work in the world give me abundant life.

Like the miracle at Cana, the miracles we experience in life are not the happy-ever-after, perfect forever kind of miracles. Maybe our miracle is a good test report or a call from a friend at just the time we needed it. Maybe it's a chance for our child to travel abroad or our acceptance into the college we wanted. A miracle may come in a beautiful sunset or a day free from pain. Miracles may take the form of a cup of water on a Haitian street or in the sounds of children coming back into the sanctuary. God breaks into the reality where we live and brings joy and abundant life.

I hope this gospel passage opens our eyes to see Christ at work in our midst. I hope it inspires us to join in God's miracle making, either by raising concerns and encouraging others or by using our gifts to God's glory. Our faith is one of those miracles. Leslie Weatherhead said, "The opposite of joy is not sorrow. It is unbelief" (Lectionary Homiletics, January 17, 2010, 62). I hope we believe and experience great joy today.

On the night of the earthquake in Haiti, people in the streets began to sing Christian songs. It was a miracle to see their faces. The song they sang in their own dialect is a familiar one: "You Are My All in All." Miracles occur even when the world seems to be falling down all around us. Our faith may be the greatest miracle of all.

The miracle at Cana was an epiphany, a revelation from God. God is in our midst. God will provide signs and miracles, perhaps through you and me. God wants to save people in Haiti. God wants to save people in Georgetown. We have been given gifts to make miracles happen in Christ's name. Jesus is our all in all. Amen.