

NEW TESTAMENT READING: 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.

OLD TESTAMENT READING: Isaiah 25:6-9

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. 7 And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; 8 he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken. 9 It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.

This is the word of the Lord... THANKS BE TO GOD.

“Come, Taste and See”

I read an interesting question this week...if the Bible was lost and someone was given the task of recording by memory the deeds and words of the Son of God, what do you think would be chosen to be included first? What should be included in the record as the top stories in Scripture? Well, the list surmised by the poser of this question included the miracle or the sign of Jesus Turning Water into Wine at Cana. This might surprise you because maybe this sign seems like it was a rather insignificant event, comparably so, anyway. It was not a healing, a resurrection, an exorcism, or a forgiving of sins. Nobody walked through locked doors, nor did it affect very many people as did the feeding of the 5000. AND, as Wendell Berry says, “*we forget a common & continuing miracle by which water (with soil and sunlight) is turned into grapes.*”¹ It wasn’t even included in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. So, let’s give some thought as to why this of Jesus’ many signs might be considered as one so very important.

In the Gospel of John, it is the event which really began Jesus’ ministry. The scene was the blissful occasion of a wedding, a wedding in a city called Cana of Galilee, about 10 miles north of Nazareth. Now, it is important to know as background information, that in 1st c Judah a wedding was a 7-day event, a long affair, complete with parading, dancing and feasting. Scripture tells us that three days into this wedding the host ran out of wine. This was a very significant problem. The hosting family was on the verge of social embarrassment. A wedding was a time to spend scarce money on the rarer things of life, on food and drink that was special, not the everyday. Good wine wasn’t just a social lubricant. It was a symbol...a sign of the harvest, of hospitality, of joy, gladness, of God’s blessings, of God’s abundance. Most Jews would have associated good wine at a wedding with the imagery of the heavenly banquet too. They would have thought of the promises of the last days, the end times.² It was thus an eschatological symbol. *(Is 25) On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the*

¹ Wendell Berry. <https://brtom.typepad.com/wberry/2009/11/blog-watch-wb-on-the-greater-miracle.html>. (accessed 1/19/19).

² Amy Richter. *The First Sign. Epiphany 2.* <https://www.episcopalchurch.org/library/sermon/first-sign-epiphany-2-c-january-20-2019> (accessed 1/18/19).

shroud that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken “

Wine was an important aspect of a wedding to say the least. So, Mary, an invited guest like Jesus, and being in all ways a mother, said to her son, “*They have no wine,*” implying, of course, that Jesus should “do something about it.” We read that there was then a back and forth between Jesus and his mother where he created a distance between himself and her, setting straight that his ministry was neither from her nor himself, but from God alone, and that it was not time for him to reveal fully who he was.³ But Mary nevertheless instructed the servants to follow Jesus’ directions, almost as though she knew that her son could not help but show who he was. And indeed, Jesus did what she asked. He told the servants to fill six very large jars with water, which then of course, we know became wine. In fact, the water was changed into a great deal of very, very, good wine. The crisis was averted. The party kept going, the guests were very happy, and Jesus’ glory was revealed to Mary, the servants and the brand-new disciples who believed in Jesus as a result.

To begin to understand the importance of this story, we need to consider first its inherent symbolism, for as we’ve said before, John does not include anything by accident. For instance, scholars tell us that in this story the jars represent the old order, (that is, the Law), since due to their size, holding upwards of 180 gallons, they were undoubtedly used for Jewish purification rituals, for washing of sins. Gerard Sloya puts it this way, “*the water of one epoch must be replaced by the wine of another.*”⁴ Thus, Jesus, the One who bore our sins once and for all on the cross, represents the one who was to bring in the new order.

And of course, the timing too is symbolic. The miracle was done on the THIRD day. The wine ran out 4 days early...the miracle occurred on the third day. Did you catch that? The water was turned into flowing, flavorful, abundant, life-giving wine on the same day as Jesus’ rising from the dead, on the day of resurrection!

³ Gail O’Day, “John,” in *New Interpreter’s Bible*, vol 11 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 536.

⁴ Gerard Sloyan, *John, Interpretation Commentaries* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988), 35.

But, most importantly, symbolic was the feast itself. When Jesus made gallons and gallons of wine from water, and the readers of John (including us) remember from Isaiah's prophesy that the: "*Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of well-aged wines, that he will swallow up death forever, tears will be wiped away, and the disgrace of God's people will be taken away from all the earth*," it is clear that Jesus is the One to accomplish this. He is the one to swallow up death, and he is the One who will gather all people unto himself. He will offer them new forgiven, free life, and in him, God will pour down abundant love and joy, as well-aged wine flowing freely. The perfection that lies in the end times, in God's glorious future, is now real...it is being ushered in, in this One who has just changed water into wine!"⁵ This miracle, this sign is saying, "*LOOK! God's future is breaking in now into our present...in Jesus*". (*make pretzel*) God's future is available now for us, in this life. We don't have to wait. This, my friends, is enough to put this sign on our top most important list, don't you think?

The contemporary theologian, Jürgen Molmann, says that "*we can now expect those things which our faith has believed to have been promised by God. With Jesus, there is an 'inbreaking' of the hidden future into our present through the hope it awakens.*"⁶ So, what does this awakening hope look like? What does this future inbreaking into our present look like? Well, it looks like the *15 yo boy who was dying of a paralyzing disease and suddenly, in his last moments, asked his dad with a voice that was far away, faint, almost lost in his delirium, "Daddy, what does impudent mean?" (repeat). With tears in his eyes, his father, straight-forwardly said, "Impudent means, bold, shamelessly bold, son." The young man paused and then said, "Put me then in an impudent position." His parents folded his arms across his chest and made fists of his fingers. The boy smiled. It was a position which defied the victory of death.*⁷ This is what it looks like. The future inbreaking, this awakening hope looks like this! It also looks like shelves in grocery stores with signs on them labeled "for federal furloughed workers" and signs on doors saying, "free haircuts, free loans". It looks like a church paying

⁵ Amy Richter.

⁶Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM Press, 2002), 6.

⁷Mary Lou Reisman, *Intensive Care* quoted in Thomas Long, "Day One Conversations", http://day1.org/2184-the_rev_dr_thomas_long... (accessed 8-16-12).

off all its school district's student lunch debts. It looks like youth groups out in the cold dark morning offering the homeless poor coats, sandwiches and hot chocolate. It looks drug addicts celebrating anniversaries of sobriety at the local AA meeting. It looks like relationships on the brink being healed, runaways welcomed home, victims of violence finding safe shelter and a kind smile, and grieving people beginning to laugh again. It looks like one who has felt the weight of guilt and shame being lifted from themselves then forgiving another. It looks like extra chairs being pulled up to tables at the local diner and student unions. It looks like children listening to the elderly, and the elderly patiently listening to children. It looks like jobs being created for the unemployed and the overworked given rest. It looks like people who live with scarcity suddenly knowing God's abundance as they feast and drink wine together and laugh for a good long time. Grace upon grace. It looks like this and so much more.

The little story in the Gospel of John is a very important story indeed. It is an eschatological story.....one in which we are affirmed that God's future now lays claim on the present. I think the Right Rev. Robert G. Tharp correctly sees it summed up best in the last sentence of a prayer from his little Episcopal Book of Common Prayer which reads... *"In Jesus, you have delivered us from evil, O God, and made us worthy to stand before you. In him, you have brought us out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life."*⁸ Yes, indeed friends, the little story of water become wine means ultimately that we ourselves are what the future now lays claim on. We are the ones in the present transformed by Jesus from water into wine, from those without into those who bring the flavorful, full bodied, fragrant, abundant life of the Lord of hosts to this world and the world to come.

On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. Amen.

⁸ Robert G. Tharp. *Sermon for the 2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time*. <http://day1.org/647-sermon-for-the-2nd-sunday-in-ordinary-time.print> (accessed 1/18/19).