

**John 2: 1-11**  
**January 17, 2016**  
**Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church**

As fondly as I remember my wedding day and as much as I believe that being married to MJ is the best thing that ever happened to me; and as wonderful as most wedding ceremonies and receptions are, there are few settings I associate less with a revelation of Jesus.

It turns out that Jesus felt the same way. I propose that the “so-what-ness” of the episode comes from Jesus himself.

So, there was a wedding in Cana near Nazareth. Reading between the lines, I guess that this was a wedding of children of friends of Mary’s. She is mentioned first and clearly has some standing at the festivities. John mentions, almost in passing, that Jesus and his disciples were also invited. I’m thinking that this was a courtesy to Mary.

In Jesus’ day weddings could be drawn out affairs. People traveled distances often on foot or by donkey. They could not hop in their cars and buzz home the next day. There is evidence that wedding festivities could go on for as long as a week, even longer.

Given the high importance of hospitality, it was a great embarrassment for the host to run out of provisions. In the case of the wedding of Cana, horror of horrors, the *wine* had run out! It is clear from the story that one of the reasons the wine ran out is that the guests have had their fill. The steward’s words reveal that many of the party are, not to put too fine a point on it, drunk. Now if I were in charge of the party that would be my signal that it was time for people to go home. But it seems that the running out of wine had caused a crisis. There was no store where one could quickly go and buy a bunch of wine boxes. To be out of wine was to be out of luck and to bear the shame of being known as a host who had not planned very well.

Mary's importance at the reception is indicated by the fact that she is privy to the host's anxiety. She passes the host's worry to Jesus. Does she think he can do something about this? According to John, Jesus had performed no miracles as yet. In fact, his response to his mother indicates that he was trying to keep a low profile. Upon hearing of the host's dilemma Jesus replies, "Dear woman, what does this have to do with you and me?" He might have said, "Mom, Is this *our* problem?" He goes on to say, somewhat obscurely, "My hour has not yet come." This dark pronouncement gets some light at the end of the passage; however for now it highlights the fact that Jesus is content simply to be a guest.

Nevertheless, Mary knows her son well. Having been made aware of the problem and no doubt having compassion for the hosts, she knows that Jesus will try to do something. So she tells the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them.

Jesus instructs the servants to fill stone jars designed to hold water for the rites of ritual purification. John estimates that this would result in upwards of 180 gallons of water. Once this is done, Jesus utters no blessing nor waves his hands. Remember he is trying to keep a low profile. Instead he has a servant take a dipper and bring a drink to the chief steward. He tastes this water and is astounded. First of all what he tastes is not water. It is wine! The party is saved! But then he pauses. At this point even cheap-o wine would have been enough: After all most of the guests wouldn't have been able to tell the difference between a vintage Chateau Latour and a jug of generic burgundy. Yet as he passes his nose over the wine and rolls another sip over his tongue he exclaims, "Great Caesar's Ghost (or words to that effect) this is the best wine I have ever tasted!" He calls to bridegroom and says, how did this happen? Everyone serves the good wine first and later the ordinary wine when no one cares anymore. You have

saved the good wine for last!” It is not clear how the steward feels about this. He might have thought, “What a waste of good wine!” On the other hand he must have been part of the serving of the wine at the beginning and known that the first wine *was* good wine. The hosts of the party, including the bridegroom must have been *really confused*. After all, the last they knew, there was no wine. Where did it come from? Who was responsible? How was it that this mysterious wine was now in the stone jars? Was someone going to send a bill for this?

For their part it is not recorded that the guests noticed. There was wine. The party could continue. Perhaps one or two noticed a different quality and nodded their heads in appreciation. Who knows?

John concludes his account with another somewhat enigmatic remark: “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”

Friends, I remain as baffled by this story as ever. What I am about to offer are attempts to discover some insight which will shed light on what this story might have to do with your lives and mine.

First of all: It helps me to remember that the gospels are written in light of Jesus’ death and resurrection. As John writes in chapter 20,

“Now Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of the disciples which are *not* written in this book. *But these are written* so that you may come to believe that Jesus that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing, you may have life in his name.” (20: 30-31)

In relating the episode of the wedding at Cana, John identifies the turning of water into wine as the first time Jesus revealed himself as the messiah. It appears that his purpose was not to wow the crowd at the party but for his disciples to notice and to recognize him as God’s Son.

This leads me to the reflection that it is not for us to wonder why more people don't recognize Jesus as the messiah. It is for us to notice for ourselves and to believe. Just as the mass of people failed to notice the star which guided the wise men to Bethlehem, it is enough *for us* to notice God's guiding presence and trust that, if our eyes are fixed on the star and our bodies and hearts follow, other seekers will join us. They will look not to us but to the light which guides us. We know all too well that if people seek to join us because we are such warm and welcoming people and they are looking for the perfect human community, they will be bitterly disappointed. We are ordinary flawed human beings like anyone else. But our eyes are lifted to a source of life which leads us to on occasion to flashes of transformation where we give off the aroma of a grace which is not ours but which witnesses to miracles.

I propose that we are called to notice when ordinary life becomes extraordinary. We are called to be aware when we or someone around us shows a flash of life that reveals the reality of what we all yearn for. We are called, like the steward to notice that in the midst of the ordinary, that something wonderful has happened, and share it. Amen.