

John 2:1-12

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and ² Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. ³ When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They don't have any wine."

⁴ Jesus replied, "Woman, what does that have to do with me? My time hasn't come yet." ⁵ His mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."⁶ Nearby were six stone water jars used for the Jewish cleansing ritual, each able to hold about twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water," and they filled them to the brim. ⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some from them and take it to the headwaiter," and they did. ⁹ The headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine. He didn't know where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. The headwaiter called the groom ¹⁰ and said, "Everyone serves the good wine first. They bring out the second-rate wine only when the guests are drinking freely. You kept the good wine until now." ¹¹ This was the first miraculous sign that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

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

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"Water into Wine"
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Mary knows. She is a wise and observant woman. Mary knows so many things. For instance...

Mary knows that weddings are elaborate and lengthy affairs. In her day, weddings lasted a week – an entire week of eating, drinking, and celebrating. The wedding gifts traditionally brought by guests and presented to the happy couple? Food and libations to contribute to the days and days of feasting.

Mary knows that the wine is running low. I'm not sure why it is her business to know that. But she knows. Perhaps she is family of the bride or groom. We don't know who they are, so we can't say for sure. Perhaps she is helping to host the event. The text isn't clear, but she carries enough authority that the servants obey her.

Mary knows that this isn't a life or death situation, but it is certainly an embarrassing one for the new couple and their families. It's not a good omen to begin your married life together known as the couple whose wedding ended early because they ran out of wine. Or to put that another way – the couple that failed at hospitality in a culture that highly esteems hospitality. Running out of wine could bring shame on them, but it wouldn't really be the end of the world. They might be the punch line of jokes for years to come, but life would go on.

But Mary knows something else. Mary knows that Jesus is among the guests. There with his disciples, he is one of the many enjoying the celebration which is about to end abruptly because they have run out of wine.

And Mary knows --- has always known --- who Jesus is. Her son, yes. But also, the Son of God. Think back to Advent, all those Sundays ago, when Mary sang her song of joy. As a young, unwed mother, surrounded by skepticism and accusations, a joy overflowed from her because she knew the child that she carried was the divine Savior of the world. Some thirty years later, that holy infant is a grown man, a Rabbi (a teacher), who is just beginning to show himself to the world, just beginning to let them in on the secret truth that he is, indeed, the Messiah come to set them free. But Mary knows – has always known what he is capable of doing.

And so, Mary knows Jesus can and will fix this. She knows, in the way that only a mother can know, that Jesus will not refuse what she asks of him. There is a little good-natured banter between them that feels like a long-rehearsed exchange between a mother and son: Mary making a request; Jesus challenging her just a little bit; Jesus doing what she asks in spite of his protests. We know from other scenes in scripture that Jesus has a sincere love and respect for his mother, such that he is assuring she is provided for even as he breathes his last breathes on the cross. He can no more refuse her than he can refuse the road and purpose that have been placed before him by his heavenly Father.

Mary knows it will be done, and so she charges the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them to do, and leaves them to it.

What Jesus asks of them is no small task. The large pottery jars used to hold the water for Jewish purification rites are sitting empty along a wall. They are enormous – the size equivalent of a 30-gallon garbage can. They all have to be filled by hand, and remember there is no water faucet, not even a garden hose. Water pulled by

hand from a well – 180 gallons of it – is poured into those receptacles. That is a lot of water. That is a lot of wine! About 909 bottles of wine by today's measurements. Filled to over-flowing, the large purification jars now hold an abundance of wine --- really good wine --- which is abundantly more than enough to last for the rest of the feast.

Signs and wonders. There will be so many more to come, but this is the first recorded in scripture. And in many ways, it doesn't even feel like a real miracle. It feels a little bit like a warm up, or a practice round: Jesus lobbing a practice throw before the game begins. And maybe it was.

In the Gospel of John, we are granted glimpses of all of these miracles – these signs and wonders – performed by Jesus. And I say performed, because someone was always watching, and they always served the purpose of revealing something about Jesus. Here are some examples of what I mean:

- Jesus raises Lazarus – “I am the resurrection and the life”
- Jesus heals the man born blind – “I am the light of the world”
- Jesus feeds 5000 – “I am the bread of life”
- Jesus turns water into wine – and says nothing

The only people who know what Jesus has done are his mother, who isn't the least bit surprised, the servants who have no status or standing in the community, and his disciples who have know idea what they have gotten themselves into by agreeing to follow Jesus.

Maybe that's what this is about. Maybe this was for them. Perhaps it was a preview of what was in store for them as followers of Jesus. Maybe this was a glimpse of the mission and ministry that awaited them if they followed in the footsteps of the Messiah. Maybe turning water into wine at a wedding feast was a sign of things to come.

- It told them that Jesus was about joy and bringing joy to his people. A wedding is a marvelous metaphor for the joyful celebration of life and the essential importance of loving relationships with each other. And this sign, or miracle, was done to sustain the celebration of life. God became flesh and dwelt among us because God loved us. And love is worth celebrating.
- It told them that Jesus was about grace. Jesus didn't owe the couple anything, but he gave it to them anyway to save them from shame. Jesus offers all of us that same grace – a gift we don't deserve, aren't owed, but are offered anyway, because of God's love for us. There is so much significance in recognizing that the jars intended to hold the waters for purification now hold the wine of joy.

Pastor Edward F. Marquart boldly proclaims that in this sign, "180 gallons of guilt are transformed into 180 gallons of grace." The disciples just don't understand yet. In a future time and place Jesus will lift a glass of wine in celebration and declare, "this is the cup of the new covenant sealed in my blood for the forgiveness of sins." That, friends, is grace.

- It told them that Jesus is about abundance. Ridiculous, overflowing abundance. If the disciples saw Jesus turn 180 gallons of water into wine, they shouldn't have been surprised that he could feed 5000. This sign demonstrated for them what they would come to understand, eventually: that the love and grace of Jesus would always be wider, deeper, and more extravagant than they could comprehend. That there would always be more than enough bread, and fish, and forgiveness.
- It told them about Jesus preference for the marginalized. He didn't let the honored guests in on the mystery, not the bride and groom, not even the head waiter. He didn't show them who he was. He saved this glimpse of his glory for the servants and slaves. The ones laboring in the kitchen, and running non-stop, they were the ones he let in on the mystery. They were the ones he invited to participate in the mystery. A sign of things to come? Perhaps. It has always been easier for those with the least to love Jesus the most.
- It told them, or at least began to reveal to them - it would be years before they really understood - what Mary had always known. This wasn't any ordinary Rabbi they were following. This was Jesus, the Son of God, the Messiah, the one with the power to save the world, the one who came that we "...might have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10).

So, pay attention people of God. We aren't always very good at noticing signs and wonders. Like the guests at the wedding, we may be blissfully unaware how much Jesus has done behind the scenes to sustain our lives and give us cause for celebration. But we do have cause for celebration. Each day is a gift, each moment of life is sacred. We were created to fully live and love this life. The Westminster Shorter Catechism is one of the many documents for teaching about the life of faith contained in our Book of Confessions. The very first question of that document reminds us that "the chief end of [humans] is to glorify God and enjoy him forever."

May you recognize the signs and wonders that point to the love, grace, and mercy of Jesus at work in your life. May you recognize the abundant blessings you have received. And may you know what Mary knows: that Jesus can and will bring you abundant life and joy.