

JOHN 2:1-11

“THE BEST IS YET TO COME”

In John’s Gospel, the story of Jesus begins, not with an account of his birth, but with a wedding reception.

Isn’t a wedding reception a strange way for Jesus to begin his ministry? No angels. No baby Jesus asleep on the hay. No Wise Men from the east ... No gifts. But that’s what John’s gospel gives us. That’s the story we find as the lectionary reading on the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany. In other words, John, and the history of the Christian church doesn’t want us to linger too long over Jesus’ wondrous birth ... but look ... consider Jesus’s life. His activities. How he brings healing ... and abundance ... and joy.

Jesus turns water into bountiful quantities of wine...
and so a wedding celebration continues in high gear.

I wonder, why does Jesus begin his ministry by supplying wine for a wedding party? And why does John place that story first? And why did our founders and leaders (including Presbyterian ... Reformed leaders) move quickly from the birth and childhood stories into the heart and life-blood of Jesus’ works?

Why not describe something, well, a little more significant?
More Spiritual?

Let’s consider the situation at hand. This is a Jewish wedding in a village named Cana, just down the road from Nazareth – Jesus hometown.

2000 years ago, Weddings were even a bigger deal than they are now.

For one thing, weddings had little competition. They had no trips to plays and museum visits ... with delicious lunches. No thrilling play-off games. No T.V.

But they did have weddings. And weddings were the best things going for entertainment and fellowship.

And a wedding and reception didn't last for a few hours. It went on for a number of days -- close to a week. And the entire community was invited and everyone took part

Wine was essential for these weddings. People enjoyed themselves. They danced and talked and told stories and recalled earlier weddings and they feasted. It was all grand fun.

But for this young, newly married couple, their families ran out of wine in the middle of their wedding feast. What a disappointment! What a disaster!

Everybody would continue to talk about what happened. What a disaster! Fifty years from now, when they totter in to celebrate their golden anniversary, some gray-haired wise-guy will whisper,
 "I remember their wedding. They ran out of wine!"

Among the guests is Mary -- mother of Jesus. Jesus is with her along with a group of his followers.

Mary sees it all -- she sees the impending disaster -- and she cares. She notices the last wine jug is being drained and wants to avert a social disaster, a blot on the reputation and future of this fine young couple.

"Jesus, she signals, "they are running out of wine."

Jesus seems to shrug-off the matter.

-- But Mary knows her son very well.

She tells the wedding organizers (the waiters and other staff) to do whatever Jesus tells them to do.

The moment is fast approaching when this joyous wedding celebration will become a long remembered social disaster.

So Jesus acts.

He tells the waiters to fill -- with water -- a half-dozen big stone jars and to drag them over to the banquet manager.

Listen -- six stone jugs -- they are heavy in themselves --
 and to fill them with 20-30 gallons of water --
 that's around 200 gallons of water --

and they are not filled from a kitchen faucet
but drawn from a community well and then
hauled back to the wedding party.

The waiters hop-to immediately. They fill those jars to the brim and drag them back to the banquet manager, who by this time is panicking and wondering what new career he will pursue. He will be remembered forever as the wine steward who miss-estimated the amount of wine necessary for that wedding in Cana.

The banquet manager -- takes a whiff (his eyes light-up) ...
He tastes ... It's wine! Really good wine!

Not the sort that comes with a screw top, but the wine that appears on fancy menus at outrageous prices, and some of us wonder who buys that stuff!

This Cana vintage, only a few minutes old, is exceptional wine, and there's plenty -- the equivalent of some 750 bottles.

The banquet manager orders the waiters to start filling glasses.

Breathing a deep sigh of relief, he bends over and speaks in the bridegroom's ear -- "For all the weddings I've done, everyone serves the best wine first and waits until the guests have drunk freely before serving the poorer stuff. But you've turned that practice around.

The groom barely hears him. The room is ringing with the sound of silverware tapping against glasses as the guests demand that the groom give the bride yet another kiss. And the festivities roar-on.

But again, isn't that an odd way for Jesus to launch his ministry?

And isn't that a strange event for John to recall and to place it front and center in his retelling of the good news of Jesus, the Christ.

And further, it's first off in the Lectionary ... in the historic calendar of scripture readings for our worship ... It comes right after Jesus' Baptism.

In the Gospel attributed to John, Jesus speaks of this episode as a sign.
A sign given by Jesus. Accomplished by Jesus. And recorded by John.

Now a sign points to something.

To something greater. More significant.

Deeper and richer.

Capable of changing our outlook –
our very lives.

When we consider the wedding at Cana story or any of the other signs in the Gospel according to John, something that stands out is: some people understand the significance of what has happened, and some people do not.

Consider the cast of characters at the wedding celebration.

Mary and the disciples and the waiters apparently catch on to the wonder of water changed into wine.

But on the other hand, the banquet manager, the groom and his bride, and most of their guests don't have a clue about what's going on.

They fail to recognize the magnificence of it all.

Yet the wine is there for **EVERYONE**. (whether they recognize the miracle, or not)

REMEMBER THAT!

And this story reveals a secret about life. **Miracles multiply.**

Signs of Jesus at work appear all around us.

And they happen whether or not we acknowledge them.

They benefit us whether or not we notice them.

Yet it is exciting and a joy to see these signs for what they are and believe in and welcome and embrace the one to whom they point.

What we think of as signs and miracles in the gospels are not weird exceptions to the orderly laws of the universe. Actually, they have the same origin as those laws.

Ponder these words of St. Augustine about this morning's Gospel:

"God who made the wine that day at the marriage feast
does this every year in vines.

But we don't wonder at vines because vines happen every
 year; And so they have lost their marvel
 by their constant occurrence."

For us to grow in grace means for us to become increasingly aware that
most everything in life is a miracle, a sign pointing to Christ...to the
 wondrous, abundant love of Jesus, the Christ. So be alert. Eyes wide-
 open. Expectant hearts and minds. **Remember that.**

But above all, I believe, the Cana story appears first in the Gospel of John
 for it sets the stage -- John tells us from the very beginning with
 unforgettable picture language -- an extraordinary story -- because John
 wants to make clear from the very beginning --

--- God's grace abounds;

(and the best is yet to come)

God's love is measured in 30 gallon water pots,
 Not teaspoons and cups;
 (and the best is yet to come)

Grace floods through Head of Christiana
 Presbyterian Church and the spirit comes
 alive -- the beat pulsates.
 (and the best is yet to come)

God's love flows from Head of Christiana, from this historic
 crossroads and out into neighborhoods and up and
 down streets and into cal-de-sacs -- to schools ...
 university and workplaces and lives are touched
 and enthused, faith rekindled;
 (and the best is yet to come)

God's love is a mighty, rushing river, not a leaky faucet -- but
 refreshing, healing streams in the desert;
 (and the best is yet to come)

God's abundant grace equips the saints for the work of ministry
 ("saints"- that's us -- that's you and me)
 Called. Equipped. Sent.
 (and the best is yet to come)

All this -- and yes, even more -- because -- at heart -- the world is a wedding celebration. Here Jesus transforms ordinary water into the wine of miracles.

Everyone benefits from these transformations, though some know the cause of them, and others do not.

To share our faith means this: Being convinced ourselves that this is true and letting others know that signs are abundant, and Jesus is the one to whom they point.

So Cana continues. It continues not simply in this sanctuary, but also when we leave here to encounter Jesus active throughout the wide world.

Not only here in church, but out there -- beyond our walls -- as well, for Jesus changes the predictability that dulls and wearies us, into the wonder that renews us and makes us glad and filled with hope.

So then, look eagerly, look intently, look with the eyes of hope and you will find the signs of Jesus most everywhere you walk.

Jesus has saved the best wine until now...and TOMORROW. **AND THE BEST IS YET TO COME**

From what I am discovering, that's the graceful way of Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church.

God's grace is always a surprise -- always what we need -- always what we share ... and in exceptional abundance.

And believe me sisters and brothers -- members and friends of Head of Christiana Presbyterian Church—

THE BEST IS YET TO COME.