



The story of Jesus turning water into wine is much more than a miracle story. It shares with us how Jesus arrives in our lives. And that happens when the conditions are right, which is not always so easy to know, ourselves... Sometimes Jesus arrives quietly; not drawing attention to himself. Sometimes he shows up when the need is very real, when his arrival is sure to be met with surprise, joy and gladness. It's a difficult thing to predict, for sure, to know when the conditions are just right for Jesus' appearance... So, what we have today is a case study of a very real event which also,

incidentally, has to do with some wine.

Now, I'm no connoisseur of fine wine, but I can read, so I did a little background research on what it takes to make a good wine; how its conditions need to be right for all the parts of wine to come together. I learned a few things, starting with the French word 'terroir' (tehr wahr), which has to do with more than just balance, but also all the positive conditions of climate, soil, sun, atmosphere, time, as well as who the vintner is. And then there's technique. A good winemaker needs the right equipment, doesn't play around with the process too much, and let's Nature do its good work with all the six factors that affect the final taste and style of the wine: Variety of grape, climate, annual weather conditions, soil type, viticulture (method of growing), and vinification (fermentation.) All this contributes to bringing a wine to completion.

Now, we were not given a detailed description of all the ingredients of the situation in which Jesus performed his first miracle, but perhaps with a closer look at the story we can leave today a little better off than when we arrived; 'ripened' by the Spirit, as it were. Maybe the conditions are right for our spirits to be nourished by the Holy Spirit through this ancient story.

It is not so much about this one particular wedding couple that this story focuses on but rather, the celebration. Apparently the nuptials took well enough, the knot was tied and soon enough it was time to celebrate.

Actually, the Jewish wedding custom, according to the late New Testament scholar Raymond Brown, “consisted of a procession in which the bridegroom’s friends brought the bride to the groom’s house, and then there was a wedding supper; commonly the festivities lasted seven days.”¹ One way or the other, it was quite a wedding party! No wonder they ran out of wine!

Now, things can go right and things can go wrong at weddings, which, I suppose, is why so many YouTube clips show bridesmaids passing out at the altar, the groom dropping a wedding ring, readers getting the giggles or unable to do the reading for tears of joy, and processions like that one a few years back where the wedding party came down the aisle to a carefully choreographed sequence of cartwheels, flips and dance moves to Chris Brown’s “Forever.” Remember that?

I don’t think the wedding party at Cana of Galilee was exactly that kind of wedding, but it did have its YouTube moment. There was that awkward moment when the wine ran out, everyone pulled out their smartphones and caught an uncomfortable exchange between Jesus and his mother about a sudden wine shortage.

Now, to be clear: this is not a story about weddings, for whoever heard a story about a wedding that not only fails to name the couple, but also fails to mention any of the members of the families at all?

This is also not a public miracle story in the way the other miracles take place later in John’s Gospel. That is to say, this was

not a miracle performed for public display. No one even knew of the miracle except the servants, and there is no record that they said anything to anyone. Even if they had, who was likely to believe them? The miracles of Jesus are meant to reveal who Jesus is to those in a position to see his ministry. But no one saw this, at least not publicly. It is not a public miracle story.

One final thing this story is not, and we may be long past this part of the conversation, but this is not a lesson on the Biblical view concerning the use of fermented or unfermented wine.

None of these are behind John's purpose in sharing this gospel story. The point of this story lies somewhere in the miracle, but probably not as we may have been trying to view it.

As one scholar has said, "God has more in mind for us than the alleviation of household shortages." Our view may be too small. As we read stories like this, we need to keep in mind the purpose that John shared in writing his gospel, so that Jesus' love for us might be better understood and that those who came after might have the opportunity to believe in him.

One last thing; this is also not a story meant for scientific ears; it is addressed to faith, and only faith can comprehend it.

The meaning of this story for most of us lies somewhere in the range of where the *literal* crosses over the border to the side of the *true*.

I have to tell you, though, that one of my favorite stories about this story comes from one of the first weddings I did, now 25

years ago. As the groom, best man and I waited in the choir room, my ear tuned in to the organ, ready for the lull between the music for the seating of the mothers and the entrance music for the bridesmaids, he said, just before we went into the church, that his greatest goal in his marriage was to make the everyday water of life become the wine of life together with this woman whom he loved.

I've stayed in touch with him, off and on, and from what I hear, while not every day has been wine, the years have been rich, and full, and he and his wife are well on their way to accomplishing what he had hoped. Good for them!

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So, getting to the crux of the matter, it is not hard to see some foundational themes in this passage: that the best can come last; that even when disaster looms, over a wedding party or even over far worse than that, it's Jesus' desire that good should happen in the midst of it.

That was the case with the disciples at this wedding in Cana. The conditions were such that they began to see Jesus with new eyes.

Now, I have to wonder if any of you have had the experience of looking at someone that you have known well for a good number of years, and suddenly, you were struck by a feeling of separateness from them, the notion that you saw them in a different light than before, that there was a different way for you to know them? This sort of thing is most striking when it happens as we sit with a parent

or spouse, a very close friend or a relative.

And it usually happens when they haven't the slightest idea what is going through our minds. We glance at them and are suddenly impressed by their distinction from us, a little epiphany happens, and we see them, even momentarily, in a whole new way. Usually these epiphanies pass as swiftly as they come, and we don't give them another thought.

I think that may be the way the disciples looked at Jesus that day, when they heard, after the fact, what he had done.

This was the first miracle John recorded. Jesus didn't even perform it for the benefit of the disciples; rather it was at his Mother's request. But when the disciples heard, they knew that somehow Jesus was different from how they knew him before.

Faith was being born in the disciples in this most ordinary and unexpected of circumstances. The conditions were just right for this to happen, and no one saw it coming.

So, think of this: when can you remember faith being born in you? Probably, it's been on more than one occasion when you can recall that something special has gone on between you and Jesus. Chances are it was in an unpredictable circumstance.

Maybe it while reading something that it suddenly dawned upon you that faith was a growing seed in your heart? Possibly, at least at some point in your life, a rebirth of faith has occurred at an unlikely time, a time largely uninvited, unsolicited, and beyond easy explanation; in the kitchen or on a trip, or during a conversation. It

may have surprised you. Maybe it occurred as you got to know someone of a different race, or faith, or nationality. If so, that's a much more Biblical phenomenon than you know!

Or, perhaps it was at the funeral of a relative; a time when many people take a fresh look at what is important in their lives and discover the gentle tug of the gospel.

Maybe it was at a wedding, as it was in Cana, when you met someone unexpected and you were gently pulled into their lives' story.

It could have been under any of a hundred other everyday circumstances, when discovering a new relationship with Jesus was the last thing on your mind. Faith is not necessarily meant to be born at a wedding, but it can be born even there. That is what happened one day in Cana.

The focus is on Jesus, who was suddenly seen by his followers as if for the first time: a revelation of who he was, beginning to dawn upon them. So, the focus of the story is not the wine, but the winemaker, the one who can make all things new. Jesus began to work his miracle quietly and gently, which led to joy and gladness for all around.

Perhaps, for us, we will have the blessed opportunity to be part of one of Jesus' miracles ourselves... to participate in the miracle, to hear, believe and realize that we too can be changed as fully by Christ as the water that became wine. Amen.

¹ Raymond Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, Vol. 1 (Garden City, Doubleday, 1966) 97-98
