

“All people take refuge in the shadow of your wings,
for in your light we see light.” AMEN!

The story of the wedding at Cana is a familiar favorite.

This story only occurs in John, and
this setting is where Jesus performs
his first miracle (or sign) and
it is Jesus' first public act in
the gospel of John.

There have been wide ranging interpretations
about these “firsts.”

You've probably all heard the sermon
that speaks about the way our Lord
likes a good party.

This account might confirm that since
the party would have certainly died
had the wine had run out,

thankfully Jesus swooped in and viola!

More wine for the party!

Now I am with you,
we like to think of Jesus that way,
because it's good to think that Jesus blesses

our celebrations.

And that interpretation reminds me of a movie
that was introduced to me while in seminary,
of all places.

That movie is “Talladega Nights:
The Ballad of Ricky Bobby.”

Don’t be surprised if you’ve never heard of it!

The film wasn’t up for any Oscar nominations that year,
but there’s this one scene where
the supporting actor John C. Reilly,

who’s name in the movie is Cal Naughton Jr.

Cal’s the star’s best friend, Ricky Bobby,
played by Will Farrell.

They are both NASCAR drivers.

The scene is where Cal says,
“I like to picture Jesus in a tuxedo t-shirt
‘cause it says like,

I wanna be formal but I’m here to party too.
I like to party, so I like my Jesus to party.” :-)

As pleasant, and funny, as that may be
there’s not really any hint in the gospel lesson

that reveals to us that Jesus was a party animal.

In fact, he comes across in the text as
not wanting to be in the spotlight at all.

His reply instead reveals that he
doesn't want to worry about things as trivial
as running out of wine. (Pause)

Another sermon could be about how Jesus saved
a couple from becoming the laughing stock
in the town for running out of wine.

They'd forever be remember as the ones
who didn't plan the party correctly.

"Remember that big wedding?
The one where they ran out of wine!"

Those stories can last a long time.

So, attached to that Jesus saved them from shame.

Jesus also rescued the career of the wine steward.

He would have been surely no longer been hired
if word had gotten out that he'd failed
to order enough wine.

There might be something in that interpretation.

I heard a sermon once at a wedding,
of all places, where the pastor looked
at the couple who were being married and said,

“You’re about to begin a new life together.

Right now, that new life is filling you with joy
and happiness and that will carry on into
your marriage.

But, other times will surely come.

Times when you might feel like you’ve run out of wine.

When those times of dryness inevitably come.

Remember the Wedding at Cana.

Remember how the mother of Jesus turned to Him
with honesty.

Remember the way the servants at
the wedding banquet followed Jesus’s directions.”

There is a good message here, but it doesn’t
feel quite complete either.

In fact, the more we try to put simple applications
on this text the more it’s true message slips
through our fingers.

And that is because John's gospel uses
1st floor words/symbols/stories to bring
about 2nd floor understandings about God.
(Pause)

On the one hand it is about weddings and celebrations.

While on the other hand it is about having
an uncommon guest present, Jesus Christ.

It is about village celebrations and banquets
where we find happy people and Jesus' blessing,
and it's about the way God uses such
celebrations to reveal God's Self.

Yet, being around, or being *the* happy people
isn't enough if we're not paying attention. (Pause)

You see, without being attentive to the
2nd floor understanding, we simply think it's
about Jesus liking to party, or the fussy caterer
who critiques the bridegroom for saving
the good wine to serve too late.

"Everyone serves the good wine first, and
then serves the inferior wine after the guests
have become drunk."

You can't blame the chief steward
he's just being practical.

And if Jesus was going to operate on
the level of practical then he'd have maybe
turned a hundred bottles of water into wine,

but according to my calculations
he created about 1,000 bottles!

That's not an epiphany (or manifestation)
to know that Jesus likes to party,

it is an epiphany to notice that,
with Jesus, they were overflowed
with grace upon grace.

It's not the sign itself that is miraculous but
what the sign reveals to us is miraculous.

And the miraculous sign that was revealed was,
when we pay attention and follow Jesus' directions,
we receive the best of the best,
in overflowing fashion,
when we least expect it.

It's outrageous and impractical, yet somehow
we know it is true.

When Jesus fixes something in our lives,
he does it to the max.

The Lord, when doing good, always overdoes it. (Pause)

Tomorrow is Martin Luther King Jr. day and
it's also Inauguration Day.

Two North American events that have
worldwide implications.

One might take a moment to recognize one of them,
both of them or neither of them...

But that doesn't sound very attentive, to me.

We must recognize both of them.

Maybe it's a sign to have these two things
occur on the same day?

In John, signs always point to God or
God's abundant grace upon grace.

And, for us, who remain attentive and
follow Jesus' directions there must be
an attentive witness and a readiness
to step up to God's justice.

For while we are Americans,
we are first Jesus Followers who freely proclaim
that no matter who is being inaugurated
the church's calling remains the same.

The values we hold as Christ' Followers,
love, equality, justice, bravery will continue

to be lived out boldly and distinctively.

For it may seem that, sometimes,
our wine has run out,
then something amazing happens...
a sign... a miracle... and suddenly

God's Word is right there accompanying us in our call.

It's no wonder then, that this account begins
with the words

"On the third day there was a wedding."

On the third day Jesus rose from the dead.

With Jesus around, everyday is the third day.

With Jesus around, we find miracles occurring everyday,
even minor ones bring significant transformations
if we have eyes to see them.

When such moments happen
we find that the event is significant,

but what happens in the midst of the event
is even more important because that's when
the sign from heaven turns us around to see

an outrageous and overflowing God of grace upon grace.

AMEN!