

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 01/19/2025



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Second Sunday After the Epiphany

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, January 19th

John 2:1-11

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Just the beginning...

The Gospel lections for the next two Sundays focus on the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Next week is the account of Jesus preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth early in His ministry recorded in Luke. This week is what John chose to record as the first public act of Jesus' ministry – the wedding at Cana. The famous story of the wedding at Cana is unique to the Gospel of John and is the first of seven signs. Why did John choose to record this event as the first public act of Jesus? What does the sign of turning water into wine reveal about Jesus? What are the implications for us?

John 2:1-11 Commentary

¹ On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. ³ When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

The third day reference means this is now the seventh day of the narrative (see *next day* references in 1:29, 1:35, 1:43). Some commentators note the connection with the creation account in Genesis. First, the prologue of John begins with "*In the beginning*" (1:1). Second, the prologue tells of the light coming into the darkness (1:4-9). Third, at Jesus' baptism the Spirit descends and remains on Jesus like the Spirit of God hovered over the face of the waters (John 1:32; Genesis 1:2). Fourth, the seven days from the baptism to the work of the new Adam at Cana matches the seven-day creation in Genesis (six days and the Sabbath). With such a comparison with Genesis in mind, the fact that Jesus refers to His mother politely as "*woman*" may also be a connection to the "*woman*" leading Adam to his first evil act. Now the "*woman*" is leading the New Adam to his first glorious act.

There may also be a connection here to the proto-Gospel in Genesis 3:15 where God puts enmity between the serpent and the woman and the serpent's offspring and the offspring of the woman. Jesus, offspring of the "*woman*", will fulfill this prophecy and eventually crush the serpent through His death and resurrection. Regardless, Mary is not mentioned by name and is mentioned only one more time in John's Gospel and this is at the foot of the cross (19:25-27) - when Jesus' hour had indeed come. The presence of Jesus' mother thus bookends His public ministry.

Running out of wine at the wedding would be socially catastrophic for the family. Some commentators note that it was not only the family's responsibility to provide enough wine, but the guests also had responsibility to bring food and drink. In this case, the whole community had failed. Regardless, running out of wine is symbolic of the spiritual barrenness of first century Judaism since wine was perceived as a joy and blessing (Psalm 104:15; Proverbs 3:10; Matthew 26:29).

Despite Jesus' objections to His mother's request, His mother goes ahead and tells the servants to do whatever Jesus asks - thus urging Jesus to act. We can only wonder at what Mary had seen in Jesus up to this point in His life that caused her to believe that He could transform the situation. We read in 1:11 that turning water into wine was Jesus' first sign. The only canonical account we have of Jesus' earlier life is the boy Jesus in the Temple in Luke's Gospel (Luke 2:39-52) that was in the Gospel lection a couple of Sundays ago. In this account we read how his mother "*treasured up all these things in her heart*" (v. 1:51). It must have been an interesting experience co-parenting a child with God! We can only wonder what caused Mary to believe this was the time for Jesus to reveal Himself. Regardless, Mary demonstrates faith, and we know how Jesus feels about faith.

⁶ Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

⁸ And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it.

⁹ When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom

¹⁰ and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now."

We read how the jars were filled to the brim with water. This avoids any possibility that this was not a true sign. The master of the feast is shocked that the bridegroom had saved the good wine until now - the opposite of the customs and norms. In the same way, the outpouring of God's abundant grace often goes against our worldly norms and expectations. The good wine in this narrative is a clear connection to the Prophet Amos and the depiction of the restoration of Israel:

"Behold, the days are coming," declares the Lord, "when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. [Amos 9:13]

The very act of turning water into wine is thus a sign of the dawning of the Messianic Age. The coming of the new Kingdom and the new covenant inaugurated by Jesus is radically different than the old covenant. Jesus uses another wine metaphor to illustrate how the old covenant and the new covenant cannot be mixed - new wine cannot be put into an old wineskin (Luke 5:37).

¹¹ This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

As a result of this sign, we read that Jesus' disciples believed in Him. There are six other signs presented along with so much other revelation in John's Gospel. This has led some people to refer to the fourth Gospel as the "Gospel of Belief". The Gospel of John was written so that we too may believe and act on such beliefs:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. [John 20:30-31]

Reflection and Action

There is more to the stone water jars than meets our Western eyes. Running water or “living water” was considered pure. The collection of such water in a stone cistern could be used for purification purposes. At the wedding, the water Jesus used to make wine was ritually clean water that would be used for purification purposes. The ceremonial purity practices were a feature of the Old Covenant and one that had become codified into the tradition of the elders – the oral Torah. By changing this water into wine, perhaps Jesus here is demonstrating how He replaces the Old Covenant with something much better. Perhaps this may also be an allusion to drinking the “living water” described by Jesus in His encounter with the woman at the well in Chapter four. There is also an obvious connection here with the wine Jesus would give His disciples at the Last Supper.

As we consider the wedding at Cana, it reveals as much about Jesus' humanity as it does about His divinity. There are some commentators who argue the presence of Mary and Jesus at the wedding suggest Jesus was related to the wedding party. It may have even involved one of His half-siblings. If this is so, we see Jesus first revealing Himself, rather privately, among His own immediate community. We too live in communities that have also failed to satisfy the hope and aspirations of the members; communities that tolerate social injustice; communities that are spiritually barren. It is in our own communities where we are called to act. To what extent do we have the heart of Mary to be moved by the human needs around us and to what extent do we have the faith of Mary to step out and urge action to be taken? Perhaps Mary's words to the servants at the wedding at Cana are also meant for us - *"Do whatever He [Jesus] tells you."*

