

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time – 2022C

Back in the first century, a wedding celebration was a big deal. In Jesus' day it was common for a wedding to last an entire week! Seven days was the Jewish custom. That's seven days of feasting, drinking, abstaining from work, and enjoying the company of loved ones, all as a way of celebrating and sharing in the new family's joy. Now that is a party, and one has to imagine that it couldn't have come cheap.

Knowing all this makes what John tells us about the problems at the wedding in Cana seem all the more pressing. "On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine'" (John 2:1-3).

Wine held deep practical and spiritual significance for Jewish partygoers. Practically, it did what wine does for us today. It filled the stomach, gladdened the heart and helped the mind drift from matters that might hinder one's effort at a weeklong Sabbath and celebration. Spiritually, it served as a sign and symbol of the joy and blessing that flow from God's right hand into the hearts and lives of his chosen family (Psalm 104:15; Proverbs 3:10). Without wine -- which was the centerpiece of the feast -- the celebration would no doubt come to a grinding halt, with its absence leaving a bitter taste in the mouths of the guests and shame in the heart of the host.

So, in steps Jesus. At the behest of his mother, Jesus makes sure the celebration does not cease. Filling six large, stone water jars, Jesus performs his very first miracle, transforming some 150 gallons of water into an overflow of top-shelf, aged-to-perfection party wine. For sure, this was not the kind of wine that comes out of a box and can be bought in bulk at Costco. This was, according to the unsuspecting father of the bride, "the good stuff." Crisis averted. Party on.

Why would Jesus provide wine for this party? Well, at least four reasons. As mentioned earlier, this moment was about so much more than Jesus' using his power as Messiah to keep the fun flowing for some cousin's wedding. This was, as the servants and disciples who witnessed the miracle firsthand no doubt began to surmise, the beginning, the inauguration of a whole new celebration. This was the Savior of the world pressing play on a new era in the kingdom of God and sending a message, namely, that all which the wine and wedding signified spiritually and culturally for the Jewish people was now available to be tangibly and fully enjoyed through him, the Christ. It's a truth that if we really let it sink in would radically change the way we --

those who know Christ and live under his gracious, sin-forgiving reign -- go about our daily lives.

For example, today as in the first century, good wine at a great wedding leads to an undeniable sense of joy. You've been there. You uncork the merlot, hear the music in the background, glance at your date all dressed up and before you know it, the edge is off, the tie is loose and something in you is saying, "Life isn't that bad." Not long after that you're dancing."

The same is true with Jesus. The forgiveness of sins leads to joy. At least it should. Knowing that through the work of the cross the God who confounds you, who convicts you and is a mystery to you has now forgiven you and is in love with you should take the edge off of you. Sure, the kids a mess, the bills are piled up and work is unfinished, and covid is still raging. But because of Christ, the only thing that really matters -- being right with God -- has been reconciled.

The apostle is himself overwhelmed at this idea when he asks, "What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). In other words, "If God is really on our side through Jesus Christ, then what could one possibly come up with that could drag us down?" Drink that in. Let it redden your cheeks. Raise your glass. Sins are forgiven and death is conquered. Jesus has filled you with joy!

Second, a good wine and a great wedding induce optimism about the future. It doesn't matter if you're in day four of a Galilean wedding celebration or in hour three of your nephew's reception. Something about having a drink in your hand, good food in your stomach and young love before your eyes makes the average person wax positive -- at least for a moment -- about the road ahead.

In God's word, wine and wedding imagery were tied to the hope of eternity. In Isaiah we hear the promise that one day, "...the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear" (Isaiah 25:6). One day we will enjoy a wedding feast to beat all wedding feasts, where God's forgiven people will celebrate their eternal, resurrected life with him -- their love -- in a brand-new home.

John's point in sharing this miracle at Cana is to tell us that in Christ the consummation of that promise has come closer than ever. When we look at the blood of the cross and the emptiness of the tomb, we see more than a reason to be hopeful; we see a guarantee of our hoped-for future. We have more than a nostalgic moment.

We have an undeniable destiny. With this being true we can aim for so much more than to simply feel hopeful for a moment while watching our nephew's nuptials. We can live hope-filled through every storm, fight, up-day and down season, knowing that Jesus Christ has fought, won and guaranteed a glorious, feast-filled future for us. Feast on that truth and then let out a satisfying sigh of relief. In Christ there is every reason to be optimistic about the road ahead.

Third, good wine and a great wedding have long been triggers to recognizing and relishing in the fact that you are abundantly blessed. Seated around family and friends and enjoying the finer things in life stirs up a sense that the happy couple and all those who celebrate with them are lacking in nothing. When the wine and food flow, when everyone is looking his best and all you see are family and friends who know you and love you, one can't help but feel rich. That's part of what makes a wedding so great.

Lastly, note that John purposely tells us that Jesus filled six stone jars, typically used for the Jewish rites of purification, with the water he changed into an abundance of wine. This is no insignificant detail. The jar would normally be used for the washing of hands and utensils, meeting the need for constant cleanliness as the law required. By transforming the water of these jars into wine for the party, Jesus is sending a message that the blessings he brings would meet the deepest of needs. He was sending a message that at his party the wine of his truth would do more than gladden the heart and redden the cheeks, it would do and give the things of God. It would bring purity, providence and so much more. Those who drink from him would not simply feel rich for a week but would be rich and whole in the things of God for eternity!

In Christ there is no such thing as poor. There is an abundance of the things that matter for those who have been baptized into his promises and cling to his cross. You want a party of people with whom you can let your hair down? You've got the family of faith. You want riches? Ask God for forgiveness and see if God ever says no. You want blessing? Ask what awaits you at the return of Christ. You want an education? Flip open his Word (your Bible) and dig for truth. You are insanely blessed, my friends.

Great wine at a good wedding has always had an effect on us. It leaves us feeling joyful, hopeful and abundantly blessed. And the same is true with Jesus. Having arrived on the scene, he has kicked off a party for his people where joy, hope and a sense of abundance are available in excess, which, begs the question: If all of this is true, that Jesus has initiated a perpetual wedding party, then why aren't more of us walking around with a smile on our faces, our ties loosened up or our high-heels off and in our hands? Why aren't we laid-back and enjoying the party?

Later in John's gospel, Jesus would make this beautiful statement regarding the reason for his arrival and the purpose of his ministry. "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Jesus came and crashed the party so that we might live richly, joyfully, hopefully and abundantly. Have you been doing that lately? Have you been walking around as if you're headed to a funeral? Have you been buried in worry, stress and short-sighted fears? If so, why?

This week, try something different. Imagine that you're sitting at a wedding. In fact, imagine that your son or daughter just got married -- to an incredible mate. Imagine that the party is paid for in cash and that you're surrounded by those whom you love. Imagine that since it's a Saturday night, there's no worry about the work of tomorrow -- all the more reason to raise your glass and toast the fact that all is right in the world today. Imagine that. Try and feel that. That sensation and so much more are totally and tangibly yours in Jesus Christ.

May the hangover from the wedding feast initiated at the arrival of Jesus linger over you forever, filling you with joy, hope and abundant blessing. Amen.

Deacon Gerry

