

Miracles in the Every Day

March 23, 2014

John 2:1-11

We are doing something really important as a congregation – as a community of faith – this morning as we celebrate the wedding of Cheryl Boggs and Carl Pennington, and we do that in the context of worship. We are honored that they have asked us as a church to be part of their special day.

Just as all of Christianity is meant to be lived out in community, it is most fitting for a Christian wedding to be celebrated in worship. Throughout the history of the church, marriage has always carried extraordinary symbolism. We find ourselves as the church universal being called the “bride of Christ”, words that speak to the intimate relationship we have with Him. And often in the context of a wedding, we are reminded that it was the occasion of a wedding at Cana where the Gospel of John tells us that Jesus performed His first miracle. It is most appropriate that we find our Scripture lesson right there today.

READ John 2:1-11

In Jesus’ day, the wedding festivities could go on for days. It would begin with the groom and his friends making a procession to the bride’s house, often at night so they could make a big show with torchlight. Whenever I read about that, I have a vision of our boys and their friends with torches and I cringe at least a little bit. After the torchlight parade, the party would move back to the groom’s house, where the wedding banquet or feast would be held. This could last for a week. It would obviously be important to plan well for the food and drink. It would be embarrassing to run out.

That is the setting for this passage from John. We are not told who the bride or groom was, but it seems likely that at least one of them was a friend of Jesus’ family. Mary seems to have been involved in some way in the banquet because 1) she is quickly engaged in solving this wine problem and 2) the servants responded without question to her instructions. She turns to Jesus for help.

John tells us that Jesus was an invited guest. As John tells it, this event is only 3 or 4 days after Jesus’ baptism. It is likely that this wedding was before He had

announced Himself at the synagogue in Nazareth, so He could even have been best known at this wedding as “Mary’s oldest boy”. It may have been that Mary’s expectations of Jesus to address this wine problem had nothing to do with His being the Son of God but was just a mother’s request of her oldest son – a request made because she had confidence that He could solve the problem. Mary may not have expected anything particularly extraordinary, just a solution.

What He did to solve the problem was unexpected and extraordinary. Some of the meaning was not obvious at the time, but we have the benefit of knowing the whole story. We can see some things here that the people present might have missed.

1. Jesus had perfect sense of time and place. By listening to God’s direction, He knew that the time had come to begin His public ministry, to be baptized with water and the Spirit, to begin to reveal Himself as the Messiah. But this was an occasion to quietly solve a problem, not to make a spectacle. There would be plenty of time for spectacle later. This was a day for the bride and groom.

2. Jesus knew that His actions in people’s lives did not have to be big public events to make a difference in people’s lives. Sometimes miracles could be quiet, private events. In this narrative, only the servants, the disciples, and Mary knew that Jesus had turned water in to wine. The other guests didn’t know, the bride and groom didn’t know, even the master of the banquet didn’t know.

Most of the people at this wedding had no idea that a miracle had occurred – that God had acted in a dramatic way on their behalf. They were busy with their own things, and were not expecting God. Think about the people there who did know. The disciples recognized this as a miraculous sign, and John says they put their faith in Him, even as they were still trying to figure Him out. But they had already demonstrated some measure of faith in Him by responding to His call to follow Him, before there were any miracles.

What about the servants? They had followed Mary’s direction, and did what Jesus told them to do. They had filled up these big jars with water and then dipped some out to serve to the master of the banquet – the caterer, I suppose. Can you imagine what was

going through the mind of the servant who got that last job? He must have been wondering if he was still going to be employed after the master of the banquet got a taste of the wash water. Can you imagine what he thought when it turned out to be the best wine? He knew what he had poured into the jar, and it was most definitely not wine. Scripture tells us nothing more about those servants, but don't you know they had a story to tell from that wedding?

That scenario has not changed in 2000 years. When we have experienced God, whether that experience is a miracle or the everyday working of God in our lives, we have a story to tell. Jesus didn't need to call anyone's attention to what He had done – people who had seen it and experienced it would tell the story.

3. This action of Jesus took ordinary vessels with ordinary contents and produced something extraordinary. For Jesus to achieve the results He wanted, the contents of the vessel had to be completely transformed. He did not make bad wine into good wine or even good wine into better wine. He made water into wine.

He did the same thing with ordinary bread and ordinary wine in establishing the sacrament of Holy Communion – taking something very ordinary and making it extraordinary, so that we ordinary people could become extraordinary with Him.

It has to be that way for us as well. For God to get the results He wants for us, for us to be the people He made us to be, we ordinary people must be transformed as radically as water into wine so we can become the extraordinary beings that people in right relationship with God are. We cannot get from where we are to where God wants us to be by making little minor adjustments that we choose. As long as keep ourselves at the center of our attention and ourselves as the focal point of our decision-making and ourselves and our self-satisfaction as our highest priority, we will not be who God wants us to be. We must be re-made from self-centered to God-centered. It is not up to us to decide what it means to be the person God made us to be – it is up to us to give ourselves completely over to the vision that God has for us, even if it is dramatically different from our vision. We will be radically transformed if we surrender ourselves and our will to God's vision. Water to wine – lost to saved.

4. Finally, and maybe most importantly for all of us on this special day, we see an example in this story of God caring about the ordinary events of our lives. It might have been an embarrassment for the wedding banquet to have run out of wine, but nobody was going to get hurt or suffer any great consequence. This was different from the healing miracles to come that relieved suffering or pain, but it was similar in that it demonstrated Jesus' caring and compassion for people.

Jesus was always engaged in the lives of people. Many times we see Him healing people when He was tired or really wanted to be doing something else, but He was moved by compassion. Jesus downplayed these miracles, often telling the people not to tell anyone, because He understood that a faith based on miracles alone would be shallow and weak. He wanted their faith – and our faith – to be grounded in a full understanding of who He is and grounded in the personal meaning of His love and mercy and forgiveness and grace. But His compassion showed in His caring about the little things that mattered to people, not just the big things, but the everyday things. He knew that it is so often the accumulation of little things that we allow to pile up and become a big thing that blocks us from God. God acted here in response to a need, even one that looks very small in the great scheme of things, and what God did made a difference. God's movement out of His love and compassion for His people made a difference for the bride and groom, it made a difference for the master of the banquet, and it made a difference for Mary, who experienced grace in the person of her son, the Son of God.

God remains engaged in our lives, every day. His action in our lives may not always be what we ask for or expect, but it will always be designed for our good – it will always be for our benefit – it will always be calling us closer to Him – and it will always be better than we could have done on our own. He will always be seeking our transformation from water to the very best wine, to perfection in Him.

Expect Him – expect His transforming power – expect His action in your life – and expect Him to come and claim you for His own, and make your ordinary day something extraordinary.

Amen.