

Preacher: Pastor Twyla

Scripture: John 2:1-11

¹Three days later, there was a wedding in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. ²Jesus and his disciples were guests also. ³When they started running low on wine at the wedding banquet, Jesus' mother told him, "They're just about out of wine." ⁴Jesus said, "Is that any of our business, Mother—yours or mine? This isn't my time. Don't push me." ⁵She went ahead anyway, telling the servants, "Whatever he tells you, do it." ⁶Six stoneware water pots were there, used by the Jews for ritual washings. Each held twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus ordered the servants, "Fill the pots with water." And they filled them to the brim. ⁸"Now fill your pitchers and take them to the host," Jesus said, and they did. ⁹When the host tasted the water that had become wine (he didn't know what had just happened but the servants, of course, knew), he called out to the bridegroom, ¹⁰"Everybody I know begins with their finest wines and after the guests have had their fill brings in the cheap stuff. But you've saved the best till now!" ¹¹This act in Cana of Galilee was the first sign Jesus gave, the first glimpse of his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

A minister is driving down to New York to see a show, and he's stopped in Connecticut for speeding.

The state trooper smells alcohol on his breath, and then he sees an empty wine bottle on the floor, and he says, "Sir, have you been drinking?"

And the minister says, "Just water."

The trooper says, "Then why do I smell wine?"

And the minister looks down at the bottle and says, "Good Lord, he's done it again!"

Today's scripture reading is about Jesus' first miracle. As you heard it takes place at a wedding. Couples today are staging some oddball weddings: At transfer stations, on suspension bridges, in front of convenience stores. But there was nothing strange about the wedding in Cana of Galilee, at least until the wine ran out.

Michelle — not her real name — is a Michigan woman who works at a 7-11. She loves her customers, her work and her fiancé.

So, she married him on the asphalt outside the 7-11 on 7/11 (July 11th) carrying her bouquet in a Super Big Gulp cup. At the reception, hot dogs and Slurpees were served at reduced prices.

In Washington state, a wedding was celebrated 18 stories up atop the Tacoma Narrows Suspension Bridge soaring over Puget Sound and high above the speeding traffic whizzing by down below. The happy twosome walked what may be the longest aisle in wedding history.

In Maine, one couple first met at their town transfer station — locally known as The Dump. He had just started working there. She had just brought her first recyclables. They plan to be married where they met while standing in the bucket loader. Town folk have been donating returnable bottles to build a honeymoon fund. The couple is seeking ways to incorporate recycled objects into their wedding outfits. They can't wait to say "I do" at The Dump.

Even traditional weddings today are not like the traditional weddings when Don and I got married. It used to be that the wedding and the reception were held at the church, or the reception was at a fire hall, or the banquet room at a family restaurant. Now couples want their reception in a country club or an upscale restaurant with a dance floor. They hire a DJ or band so the guests

can be entertained and dance. And the meals that are served at some of these weddings are incredible—delicious—but the per plate costs must break the parents' bank account.

Many of the couples today either offer an open bar or some kind of alcohol for their guests at the reception. That is one similarity we observe between present day weddings and the story from Jesus' life that we are considering today. In the first century, weddings were held for a week, and usually the whole town was invited. It was considered an insult if you did not come when you were invited. This wedding was probably in its' third day. So, wine was supposed to be supplied for all of the guests for the whole week.

Wine was very important at that time. One reason may have been that the water supply was not always the best. So wine was the beverage served at meals. Wine was served at all of the festivals. It was a special and necessary tradition to have wine served for the whole week of the wedding party.

Wine was a symbol of joy at weddings. It was the custom that the best wines were served first, while everyone was sober enough to know the difference between the good wine and the cheap wine. Running out of wine was a major embarrassment, it broke the unwritten laws of hospitality. When a family hosting a wedding ran out of wine it threatened to put a serious loss of honor on the family.

A lot of careful planning needed to happen to accommodate the needs of all the guests. So, friends, especially those from the inner group of the wedding celebrants, usually sent gifts such as wine ahead of time to be available for the wedding celebration. A lack of wine thus implies a lack of friends. So, when Mary asked Jesus to do something to solve this problem for the host, she probably was not asking him to perform a miracle. As a friend of the couple's family, she simply wanted him to do something to save their friends from embarrassment.

When Jesus responded to her request as he did, saying that his time had not yet come, Mary undoubtedly did not understand why he responded that way; but she did not argue with Jesus. Always in the back of her mind, she remembered that he was more than her human son; he was the Son of God. Mary respected that and, therefore, she trusted him to do something—to do the right thing and she instructed the servants to do whatever he asked.

How often do we wish that we could order Jesus to do what we want him to do? Somehow, like Jesus' mother, we need to have the faith and confidence that Jesus has the power to act, and yet give Jesus the freedom to act however he deems best. When we bring our problems to Jesus, we may think we know how he should take care of them. But Jesus may have a totally different plan in mind. Like Mary, we should submit—we should trust him—and allow him to deal with our problems as he sees best. Jesus certainly did solve the problem. Without fanfare, he turned the water into wine, and pretty much rescued the hosts' honor with his fine miracle.

Jesus told the servants to bring him the six stone jars used for purification. Each one would hold 20 to 30 gallons. Usually, these jars were filled with water used to pour over their hands, to wash away the residue of anything they touched that made them symbolically unclean according to Jewish law. At that moment in time the jars were empty, so Jesus told the servants to fill them with water.

Jesus did not transform the purification water that was in the jars into the wine; but he transformed new water that has been placed in the old containers. So here we have new wine created in old vessels. This is in contrast to Mark 2:21-22 where Jesus uses the illustration that new wine needs new wineskins, just as our hearts need to remain pliable and open to accepting the life-changing truths of Christ.

Here the image seems to be that the new wine can be held by the old containers. This suggests that the old container could be our bodies, and that Jesus can transform what is inside the container. Remember, the water in that area in those days was not fit to drink. The unfit water was transformed into the best wine ever; likewise then, we learn, that the sinner becomes a saint, the pagan becomes a child of God, the polluted becomes pure. So, what does this mean for us? It means that if Jesus can change water into wine, he can change us, too. This is a miracle of transformation.

Some people want to know how Jesus could have done this. They believe there must be some kind of logical or scientific explanation. Why? There is no need for us to understand. We reap no benefits from having that information. The mystery we are left with from the not knowing challenges us, and points us towards putting our faith in Christ, to trust that he can help change us from old ways and habits to someone better.

After the host tasted the wine and found it to be the best wine; the assumption he made was that the bridegroom saved the best wine for last instead of following the tradition of serving the best wine first. The servants knew where the wine came from, but because Jesus' ministry was just beginning with this miracle, they did not know who he was and how to explain what he did. But the disciples saw what happened, and they put their faith in Jesus.

The miracle itself is not the fuel for the lesson we learn from this story. It's not about the miracle; it's all about Jesus and how he can change us. Jesus, the incarnation of God, is the one who transforms us when we believe that he came to save us from our sinful nature. Jesus shows us how to make changes in our lives when we trust him and follow his example. When we put our faith in him, we find that Jesus redirects our inner focus, gives us inner strength to persevere and rise above our sin that separates us from God, and he transforms us. This is all a part of God's plan to set us free. We can change. We all have something in us that needs to be changed. We can change and be all that God created us to be.

Leroy Eims who wrote, "The Lost Art of Disciple Making," shared this personal story of how God transformed him.

"As a new Christian, I was working through Colossians. The Holy Spirit caught my attention with Colossians 3:8: 'But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language.' I tried to slide past the verse, but the Spirit kept bringing me back to the words 'get rid of anger.'

I had a violent temper. Whenever it flared, I'd haul up and bash my fist into the nearest door. Even though I often bloodied my knuckles and had once smashed a beautiful ring my wife had given me, I couldn't stop. Yet here was God's Word saying, 'Get rid of anger.' This wasn't just advice given to the people of Colossae, centuries ago. It was God speaking to me.

So I made a covenant with God. I promised him I would work on my anger. My first step was to memorize Colossians 3:8 and review it daily. I then asked the Lord to bring this verse to mind whenever I might be tempted to lose my temper. And I asked my wife to pray for me and remind me of this verse if she saw me failing in my promise to the Lord. In time, that text became a part of my life. Gradually the sin of anger lost its grip on me.

Like changing water into wine, like the transformation of this man, Leroy Eims, like the transformation of Saul, who despised and murdered Christians, into Paul, an apostle for Christ, we can be transformed from living with the troubled habits and wrongs in our lives to someone new and better, pleasing our God and serving our Lord. Hallelujah! Amen.