

2nd Sunday Ordinary C
John 2, Cana
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No shotgun wedding here. It's a very proper arranged marriage—and the whole village of Cana is invited. The problem is, the whole village comes, whether they have RSVPed or not. So, the wine starts running out on the third day of the festivities. Somehow the problem is solved, the family's honor is preserved, and everyone goes home happy and maybe a bit tipsy.

Only two months ago, Maria and I were at such a wedding in Israel, although it only lasted one day, non-the less the whole village did come and there were about 500 guests. And yes, the wine was flowing...

Most church people know the story of “The Wedding at Cana” because that's when Jesus changes water into wine. Unless you're an old-fashioned Baptist, any biblical encouragement to drink wine... is a good text to know!

This account from John's Gospel is the third of three epiphanies (the manifestation, the revealing of Christ). The first we heard was two weeks ago, about the three kings who visited Jesus at Bethlehem. The second we heard last week when Jesus was baptized at the Jordan river, by John the Baptist, and the Lord declared “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.”

Today we hear of the third epiphany, the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the miracle of the water being turned into wine at the wedding feast... a key part of John's revelation of who Jesus is.

There is a lot of symbolism in these passages from John; I'd like to mention a few:

Jesus bestows a huge honor on his mother Mary... now at first it might be difficult to see the honor Jesus gives to Mary when he says, "Woman, how does your concern affect me? My hour has not yet come." (John 2:4) In our culture it would be disrespectful to address a lady as "woman" and above all one's mother as "woman", but throughout the Gospels Jesus called many ladies "woman." (Matt 15:28; Luke 13:12; John 4:21, 8:10, 20:13) Jesus intends to teach us something when he calls Mary woman. He does it for **us**. The first woman of the Old Testament is Eve and in Genesis God says to the serpent,

*I will put enmity between you and the **woman**,
and between your offspring and hers;
He will strike at your head,
while you strike at his heel. (Gen 3:15)*

God is telling the serpent there will be hostility between the serpent and woman, and the woman's offspring will strike the head of the serpent. The woman's offspring who will strike the serpent is Jesus. It seems Jesus deliberately called Mary "woman" at Cana, to highlight Mary as the Woman of the New Covenant.

Later in John's Gospel we read that as Jesus was dying on the cross he said, "Woman, behold your son...Behold your mother." (John 19:26-27) It

was Jesus' way of asking his friend, the apostle John, to look after his mother. We also understand this to mean that Jesus was giving his mother to **us** also as our spiritual mother. Mary now has a new role, as well as the mother of Jesus she is also Mother of the Church.

So at Cana, when Jesus calls Mary "Woman" it means her role as mother of Jesus will be expanded, but it is only when we hear Jesus' words at the cross ("Woman, behold your son...Behold your mother") that we fully understand; she is transitioning from the mother of Jesus to be the mother of us all.

In Jesus' day, issues of ceremonial purity are reaching fever pitch. Many things can cause impurity: touching a corpse, blood and other bodily fluids, eating non kosher food, etc. Only water in stone containers remains pure for washing. Wine, not ceremonially pure, is stored in impure ceramic jars.

By the time the wine runs out, there are many empty jars lying around. Why doesn't Jesus ask the servants to fill them with water rather than the stone jars... that were used "for the Jewish rites of purification"? Aware that contaminating the stone jars is a huge breach of Jewish law, the author stresses that the steward in charge, does not know where this new batch of wine is coming from. Only Jesus and the servants, in the back room can chuckle over their little secret.

Jesus is demonstrating that He is superior to the rituals and traditions of the Pharisees. Jesus' superiority is also shown in the first four words of this story: "On the third day". It looks forward to Jesus' resurrection on the third day—but we must also look backward at scripture. Sure enough, the "third day" occurs at the most critical juncture in Israel's history—the giving of the Law in Exodus (19:9-25). As the Israelites arrive at Mount Sinai in the desert, Yahweh tells Moses to consecrate the people by having them wash their clothes "today and tomorrow"—because "on the third day Yahweh will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people". "The third day" is used repeatedly here (vs 11, 15, 16).

Instead of Moses... Yahweh's Son has come down "in the sight of all the people" to introduce a New Age where human need and enjoyment **out play** overly rigid Laws (see John 1:17).

The author ends the story with: "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him" (2:11). To those who see only with the outward eye, all these events at Cana are strange and wonderful; but, to those who understand, they are also signs. In the gospel of John, unusual events are never called miracles; they are signs. Which brings me to the final point:

If we look closely, the very water that turns into wine, tells us of our rebirth in baptism. One thing is turned into another from **within**, and in a hidden way a lesser creature is changed into a greater. All this points

to the hidden reality of our second birth. There water was suddenly changed; As in our baptism, our soul is suddenly changed. By Christ's action in Galilee, the law withdraws and grace takes its place; the old covenant with its outward discipline is transformed into the new. For, as the Apostle says in 2nd Corinthians: "The old order has passed away; now all is new!"

This great story takes up only 12 verses at the beginning of John's Gospel. Yet the significance of what's packed into those 12 verses can't be underestimated. We learn about God's revelation of himself in Jesus. We learn (and taste?) of the extravagance of the Kingdom of God and we learn of God's eventual victory, despite our circumstances, and the depressing state of the world. We also learn that Jesus likes weddings very much. Also, for that matter, he likes a party!