

## WATER AND WINE

John 2:1-11

In his book *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, author Neil Postman writes about an advertising man who has to create a television commercial for a new California Chardonnay. He hits upon the idea of having Jesus stand alone in a desert oasis. A gentle breeze flutters the fronds of the stately palms behind him. Soft Middle-Eastern music caresses the air. Jesus holds a bottle of the wine at which he gazes adoringly, turning toward the camera he says, “When I transformed water into wine at Cana, this is what I had in mind. You’ll become a believer.”

The miracle of turning water into wine seems different than other miracles. When Jesus heals the lepers, gives sight to the blind, calms the storms, drives out demons, and even in feeding the 5,000 He is dealing with serious—even life threatening—issues. But turning water into wine—no one was going to die or live a life cursed or even go to bed hungry if they ran out of wine. It was not a life or death situation. So why is this miracle—John calls it Jesus’ first “sign”—Jesus’ first miracle instead of something like making the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, or the dead to rise?

Stories about Jesus walking on the water or healing an enfeebled arm or healing someone from a fever all make good stories. But is that all they are—good stories? We don’t see Him walk into our lives to change the doctor’s report from malignant to benign, give us a new job with full benefits, and fix our clunker of a car. Jesus doesn’t seem to be a part of starting a new semester, getting up on a cold, dark winter morning, or paying off the bills.

But that is exactly why the miracle of turning water into wine can give us some insight. No, no one was going to die because they ran out of wine. But a wedding was very different in Jesus’ time than it is today. The wedding in a village like Cana involved the whole village. In most villages everyone was related to everyone else and even to people in neighboring villages like Nazareth where Mary lived. The wedding wasn’t a 1/2 hour service followed by several hours of a reception. It could take days. It was a major community event like a wedding, graduation open house, community festival, and state fair rolled up in one. To run out of

wine would have been an extreme embarrassment to the family of the bride who would host the party and to the whole village. We have “FISH” dinners once a month here involving concerned Christians and internationals in our community. Each time we can’t be sure how many will come. Sometimes things have to be stretched, and that can cause pain and worry. How much more it must have been for that family in Cana.

So Jesus turns the water into wine. He puts Himself into the life of people. That is what we see in that miracle and what we see throughout Jesus’ ministry. He not only did miracles of healing, He spoke to all kinds of people both sick and healthy. He embraced children. He ate at the home of hated tax collectors, like Zacchaeus, talked to a Samaritan woman at a well, allowed a “sinful” woman to anoint His feet with oil. He taught them parables from everyday life like sowing seed, praying in public, and feeding children. Jesus encountered people, young and old, rich and poor, sick and healthy, Jew and non-Jew, Galilean and Judean, fishermen, farmers, and lawyers right where they were in their everyday lives.

A whole Old Testament book, Song of Solomon, describes the love exchange between a man and a woman about to be married. Why is this in the Bible? The Church has always seen this book as a comparison of the relationship between Jesus and His bride the Church. God uses the personal, intimate, real, earthly image of marriage to describe His relationship to us. It is a relationship that is not exotic or theoretical, but real, physical, every day. In Jesus Christ God wants to come into our everyday lives, to be “married” to us.

But do we feel “married” to God? Is that the way we see God in our lives? As modern people we tend to describe our lives as our own creation. We see ourselves as the basis of our decisions, our efforts, and our initiatives. It makes it hard for us not to see ourselves as the center of the universe.

The book “Parent Power” by John Rosemond stresses that in parenting families should be parent-centered, not child-centered. The problem with a child-centered family is that the children then

see the world as revolving around them. Colleges now deal with young people who have difficulty handling stress because their parents worked so hard to protect them and keep any stress out of their lives. But the even bigger problem is that it makes it hard for them and us to see God, not us, as the center of things.

That is why Jesus enters into our real, everyday lives. When people come back to church after drifting away and are asked, “Why did you come back?” they often say, “I have been searching for something more in life, and my search has brought me back to God.”

The problem with that is it isn't really true. Jesus showed up at the wedding, not vice versa. Jesus sought people, not the other way around. We don't look for Jesus; He looks for us. How does He do that? If someone were to ask, “I want to be with God,” then our answer as the Church is to say, “Here, have some bread, drink some wine.” What is more everyday than eating a meal? Bread and wine were regular part of every meal in Jesus' time. Meals are what we do to survive, but they are also the basis of so much of our gathering with other people. What is more universal to human life than water? Jesus chooses to bring Himself into our lives in the water of Baptism. What is more human than a human himself? Jesus came to this world as a human, and He comes to us today in the Christian humans He surrounds us with. The Christian life is not something “special” or spectacular. It is about the ordinary and predictable like eating three square meals a day.

*The DaVinci Code* became popular because it portrayed the Christian faith as something that was supposed to be something exotic and mysterious. After all, God is supposed to be supernatural, beyond our everyday experience. Instead our God wants to be close to us, ordinary, everyday. Yes, He is beyond our everyday comprehension, but He has placed Himself into our physical, ordinary world of water, bread and wine, words, and other people, just as He came into that wedding at Cana.

That's why we come to church, not to escape the everyday, but that we return to the ordinary Monday life more aware of the everyday presence of God with us. Instead of God

transporting us out of our everyday grind, He places Himself into our ordinary life 24/7, Monday mornings, Tuesday noon, Wednesday afternoons, Thursday nights, Friday late-night, Saturday late mornings as well as Sunday.

Sermon delivered by Pastor Mark T. Heilman  
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