

## Best for Last

John 2:1-11

Have you ever lost something? Maybe you put something down in a rush, without thinking. Maybe you needed to keep something secret for later, so you hid it in a special spot, that you then forgot when later comes. No matter what, when you look and find something you've lost, it's inevitable that whatever you were looking for is found in the last spot you look. If only you'd looked there first!

The same thing can happen with problems we face. Have you run out of ideas? In the musical "tick, tick, Boom," the main character, based on composer Jonathan Larson, is finally able to find the idea for the final song his musical needs while he's swimming. Have you run out of patience? Sometimes you need to go take some deep breaths or calm down to find some patience, or sometimes you'll be put in situations where you have to learn how to be patient. Have you run out of money? You can always check your couch cushions or the pockets of your dirty laundry, or do a little more budgeting. Have you run out of enthusiasm or joy? Those things often seem to be found when we're not looking for them. Whatever you've run out of, you can find it in the last place you look.

In today's Gospel lesson, we find a wedding that has run out of wine. And that's a problem. Wine isn't merely a social lubricant at the time, you see. Wine is a sign of the harvest, of God's abundance, of joy and gladness and hospitality. And so when the wedding runs short on wine they run short on blessing. And that's a tragedy for the couple, for the families, for everyone there. It would have been a major social failure for all involved. In fact, in first century Palestine, these social customs were so serious that lawsuits could be filed against people who ran out of food and wine.

That's when Mary the mother of Jesus steps in. She knows there is a problem. She's not bossy, she doesn't try to fix things herself, she isn't critical, and she doesn't blame herself or others. She knows who Jesus is. She just gives the problem to Jesus, and points others, especially the servants, to Jesus as well.

And so Jesus, prompted by his mother, steps in and provides more wine. Not just more wine, but more wine than the whole crowd could have drunk not only during the days of the wedding feast, but probably across a few weeks. Six jars, we're told, each capable of holding 20-30 gallons of water. In changing the water of those six large basins of water for purification, Jesus is providing close to an additional thousand bottles of additional wine. Not only that, but as the surprised steward discovered, it's not just cheap boxed wine Jesus provides, but the best wine yet served. The best had been saved for last.

Now, there wasn't any official polite backing for the idea that you serve the good stuff first, and then get out the cheap stuff once everyone has had a chance to become a little tipsy and their palates to be a little less refined, but it would certainly make sense to anyone being frugal to do things that way. But just because it's frugal doesn't mean it's polite, or right.

Jesus saved the best for last when he changed the water into wine, not making it into the cheap boxed stuff but instead making into a fine vintage. But that wasn't the only time Jesus saved the best for last. We're reminded that turning water into wine is only the first miracle, the first sign, Jesus does. In the Gospel of John, the miracles of Jesus are called signs. They point to who Jesus is and what he came to do.

John tells us at the end of the Gospel that he specifically chose the seven signs that he mentions, out of all of the many signs and miracles Jesus did. John chose these miracles, these signs, because they point us to who Jesus is.

Changing water into wine was the first sign, but it wasn't the last. Other signs point to Jesus fulfilling the prophecies about the Messiah as he heals the sick, gives sight to the blind, makes the lame to walk, and feeds the 5000. The last and greatest miracle Jesus does is to defeat death itself. He raises Lazarus from the dead as his seventh sign, but that's not really the last one, either. Jesus then goes to the cross to defeat death once and for all. Death doesn't turn out to get the last word. Life does.

Jesus continues to save the best for last. This first sign, of water turned to wine, of a joyful wedding celebration saved, points us to the picture of another wedding, the great wedding feast at the end of everything, when we will celebrate without end.

The Prophet Isaiah promises that “the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine, or rich food full of marrow, of aged wine well refined” (Isaiah 25:6). When God is host, he serves only the best—he saves the best for last. Indeed, God saves the best for the Last Day, which is why all other feasts are only a foretaste of the Feast to come. The Wedding Feast of the Lamb will be the party to end all parties. It will be the best party with the best music and food you could ever imagine. Until then, we wait for that happily ever after. We wait for everything to end well. We wait, knowing that the best is yet to come.

Those who work with stories know there are two basic types of stories; comedies and tragedies. If a story ends in a funeral, it's a

tragedy. If it ends in a wedding, it's a comedy. Not a comedy in turns of laughter, but in terms of joy, of a happy ending. That's why the Bible doesn't end with a funeral, not even a “ruined” one like the ones Jesus attends where he raises the dead and ends the need for the funeral. Instead, the Bible ends with a wedding. It ends with a marriage celebration full of joy, one that celebrates God not just visiting his people, but living with us, dwelling with us, forever.

The signs we look to show that God loved us enough to come into the world as a baby, to die on a cross, to rise again for us. If we look to the signs that God gives us, though, we'll see God at work in unexpected ways, showing he is with us and giving us abundantly more than we need. Jesus performing this miraculous sign—willing water into excellent wine—invites his disciples, and us, to believe in him, and to experience life in his name. With this miracle we also are given a foretaste of Jesus's ultimate glory revealed in his death and resurrection. That glory will finally be fully revealed when he will return to restore all things. Blessed with life given by Jesus today, we look ahead to further blessings on the last day when, among other things, there will be an abundance of excellent wine as we celebrate the marriage feast of the Lamb in his reign that has no end.

The miracles Jesus does are signs. They point us to what God is doing in the world. They point us to the fact that the best is yet to come. They remind us that no matter what challenges we face, God is saving the best for last. That's a promise worth waiting for.

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