

More Than a Miracle

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning. My name is Catherine St. Clair.

Today's scripture reading is from the Gospel according to John 2, verses 1-11, as found in your liturgy. On the third day, a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee.

Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, They have no more wine.

Woman, why do you involve me? Jesus replied. My hour has not yet come. His mother said to the servants, Do whatever he tells you.

[1 : 09] Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

Jesus said to the servants, Fill the jars with water. So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew.

Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, Everyone brings out the choice wine first, and then the cheaper wine, after the guests have had too much to drink.

But you have saved the best till now. What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

[2 : 18] This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord Christ. Hello. Good morning, Christchurch family. Happy New Year.

Happy 2022. For those of you here for the first time, normally you'd find Pastor Jonathan or Pastor Andrew up here preaching, but today you've got me.

My name is Jesse, and I work in the church office. I'm here because a few months ago, Pastor Andrew asked if I'd like to preach on December 26th, which was last Sunday, or today, January 2nd, and I picked today because I thought it would give me an additional week of preparation.

But it just turned out I had an additional week of procrastination. So today is not only the first Sunday of the new year, but it's also my first time preaching here at Christchurch. I've preached at some other churches.

I've preached a few times before, but it's my first time preaching here, and depending on how things go in the next 30 minutes or so, we'll see if it might also be my last time preaching here. So today's sermon text is John 2, verses 1 through 11, where we see Jesus performing his first sign, turning water into wine.

[3 : 30] And even though turning water into wine is a miracle, it's miraculous, John, the author of this gospel, calls it a sign. And why is this a sign?

Why is it something that's more than a miracle? So for two reasons. One, it is a foretaste of the age to come. And two, it is a glimpse of God's glory.

A foretaste of the age to come and a glimpse of God's glory. We'll also talk about the significance of this sign happening at a wedding.

And we'll talk about the significance of wine. So the four keywords you can keep in your head as you're listening are foretaste, glimpse, wedding, and wine.

All right, let's start our exploration of today's passage by going to the last verse, verse 11, where it says, What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory.

[4 : 33] And his disciples believed in him. Now, what does it mean that this was a sign? To help explain this, I'll talk about a store that most of us know about and some of us might even love.

This store is known for its bigness. The stores themselves are big and the items for sale in the store are big because they're sold in bulk. So what store do you think I'm talking about?

Costco, yeah, you got it. Costco. Costco is known for being big, right? But Costco is also known for something small. And that thing that's small that Costco is known for are small samples, right?

How many of you, when you go to Costco, try to get a few samples? Yeah, most of us. And turning the page here. In case you've never been to Costco, if you've never experienced the wonder of free samples, what it is is throughout the main aisles of the store or scattered in the main aisles of the store are these stations where there's a Costco employee kind of giving out free bite-sized pieces of some type of food item that's for sale at that store.

And so for example, let's say they're selling frozen ravioli at Costco. So if there's a sample of this ravioli, there'll be an employee who's heating up the ravioli and then kind of apportioning it out into little bite-sized pieces.

[6 : 09] Now, you might be wondering, what does ravioli have to do with the Bible? Well, I'm going to ask you a question, which is, what is the purpose of a sample of ravioli?

The purpose, what is the purpose of a sample? The purpose of a sample is to give you a taste of a larger item and to point you towards it, right? A sample is supposed to give you a taste of the item and point you towards it.

The same for a sign. Another example of a sign is if you drove here today and you took the freeway, you might have seen a sign on the freeway that says University Avenue or Telegraph Avenue, right?

And that sign is not the road in itself, right? The sign that says University Avenue isn't University Avenue. It's meant to point you towards it. So, in the same way, in the Bible, when we see something that Jesus has done, called a sign, it's supposed to give us a taste of something larger and to point us toward a larger reality.

Also, if you look at verse 11, it says, the first of the signs. What's kind of interesting is that the Greek word that we translate here as first, it's the Greek word *archa*, which can also be translated as beginning.

[7 : 37] So, you could also translate this as the beginning of the signs. And the word *archa* is a pretty important word in the Bible. At the beginning, at the opening of the Gospel of John, at the opening of the Greek translation of the book of Genesis, how do those two books begin?

They begin the same way, right? In the beginning. And in Greek, that term is N-R-K. So, by calling this the beginning of the signs, we have kind of a connection that connects us to creation, that connects us, that kind of lets us see that it's a hint that Jesus is the creator God.

Jesus is God. The same God who created at the beginning, the same God who is preexistent and eternal. Now, the miracle itself, the sign, turning water into wine, also connects us to God's creation in Genesis 1, where God creates the universe out of nothing.

And this doctrine of God creating out of nothing has a Latin phrase, has a Latin name for it. Does anyone know it? Yeah, some of you are nodding. Yeah, *creatio ex nihilo*.

Pardon my pronunciation. But I think it's pronounced *creatio ex nihilo*, which means creation out of nothing or creation from nothing. And there's an aspect of that to this miracle that Jesus does here, turning water into wine.

[9 : 14] What I mean is that some of the key and necessary ingredients that make wine, wine, are simply not present in water.

or to look at it from another perspective, let's think about healing, right? We know Jesus healed people. With the human body, we know that if we give the body enough time, it kind of can naturally heal from many injuries.

Not all of them, but the human body can heal. Or if you have a broken bone, right? I've actually had a fractured middle finger before from a motorcycle accident. And I know that if you just kind of put things back and give it enough time, the bone will heal.

The human body can heal itself. But with this sign, with this miracle of Jesus turning water into wine, no matter how much time, no matter how much time you give it, no matter how long you wait, water will never become wine.

The ingredients for wine simply are not present in water. Water doesn't have sugar that can be broken down by yeast to create alcohol.

[10 : 30] Water doesn't have pigment from grape skins to give wine its color. Water doesn't have the flavor compounds that make grape juice taste grapey and wine taste winy.

Should have revised that one. So without spending too much time on this topic, when Jesus turns water into wine, he is demonstrating some aspect of *creatio ex nihilo*.

He's creating something out of nothing. He's demonstrating the power of God to create something out of nothing. So with this sign, which is more than a miracle, which is the beginning of his signs, Jesus is revealing to us that he is God.

The same creator God who is preexistent, internal, who created the universe out of nothing. Now that we've established what a sign is, let's explore today's passage from the first verse.

We'll look at the first two verses. Feel free to follow along in the Pew Bibles or on a Bible app, or in the liturgy. Verse one, What's the setting?

[11 : 53] The setting here is a wedding. And Jesus, his disciples, and his mother have all been invited. Although we don't know if Jesus was a friend of the married couple or their families, in that time and place, it was customary to invite the entire village to a wedding, and even people from neighboring villages.

Jewish weddings often lasted for seven days and included music and dancing. The groom's family normally hosted the wedding and would try to invite as many people as possible, especially distinguished guests like a religious, like a well-known religious teacher.

One commentary suggests that the host of this wedding was probably well-off because of the presence of servants at the banquet and the large amount of water in these stone jars.

Six jars doesn't sound like a lot of water, but remember, each jar held between 20 and 30 gallons. So if you do some math, how much water in total is that? 120 to 180 gallons.

So, you're probably expecting a lot of guests. Let's look at the next two verses, verses three and four. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, they have no more wine.

[13 : 19] Woman, why do you involve me? Jesus replied, my hour has not yet come. If you feel surprised by this or find it hard to understand, you're not alone.

Bible scholars and pastors also admitted that this passage, especially verse four, can be hard or perplexing for modern readers to understand.

Actually, let's go back a little bit. Going back to this wedding. We see in verse three that the wedding has run out of wine, right?

Jesus' mother says to Jesus, they have no more wine. Now, why is this a big deal? So, the Middle East, then and now, is a shame and honor culture.

And the family is the fundamental unit of society. So, it's a little bit different than here in the West, where the individual is the fundamental unit of society.

[14 : 25] And although we do have some aspects of shame and culture, we're kind of relative to the Middle East or other Eastern cultures, we're kind of more of a guilt and innocence culture. So, shame and honor culture in the Middle East.

To run out of wine at a wedding is to fail to be a good host. It's to fail to live up to that expectation of hospitality. So, to run out of wine at a wedding could bring lasting shame to the groom's family.

So, that said, let's go back to verse 4, where Jesus says, Woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come. So, Jesus says, Woman, and the Greek word used there is kind of equivalent to the English word ma'am.

It's respectful, but it creates distance. Then, when Jesus says, why do you involve me? The Greek there is just four words, which if you translate word for word, says, what, me, and you.

What, me, and you. And when you look at other occurrences of this phrase in the Greek version of the Old Testament, it creates distance between the speaker and the hearer.

[15 : 44] So, taken in total, Jesus is creating a distance between himself and his mother. And then, at the end of verse 4, Jesus says, My hour has not yet come.

And what is he talking about here? Well, in the Gospels, when Jesus talks about his hour or the hour or my hour, he's referring to his crucifixion and the time and events surrounding it.

So, his arrest, death, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. The word hour is spoken of this, in this way, in the Gospel of John seven more times and also in the other three Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

So, when Jesus says to his mother, my hour has not yet come, he is telling her that his primary task, his primary mission on earth, has not yet arrived.

All the signs and miracles that he's done, those are important, but what is most important for us, for humanity, to be saved, what is most important for our relationship with God to be restored, was, one, Jesus' death on the cross as sinless and fully God and fully human, two, his resurrection, and three, his ascension.

[17 : 11] Putting all these ideas together, when Jesus says to Mary, woman, why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come. These words prepare us for what is about to happen.

They prepare us for what Jesus is about to do. He's saying that he's not merely obeying his mother's request, but it's also not the fulfillment of his mission on earth.

It's like we're talking about two ends of a spectrum. What Jesus is about to do at this wedding is not merely a small-scale act of salvation for this married couple and their families, but it's also not the cosmic-scale act of salvation, this history-changing act of salvation for humanity and creation.

Jesus' hour had not yet come. Let's look at the next two verses, verses 5 and 6. His mother said to the servants, do whatever he tells you.

Nearby stood six stone jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from 20 to 30 gallons. Let's talk about the stone jars here.

[18 : 31] The text says that they're used for ceremonial washing, and we see some more information about that in the Gospel of Mark, chapter 7, verse 3. The Pharisees and all the Jews do not eat unless they give their hands a ceremonial washing, holding to the tradition of the elders.

The ritual involved here, here involved servants pouring water, taking water out of these stone jars and pouring it over the hands of guests. spirits. And there is some significance to these stone jars that we should discuss further.

The ceremonial washing done using these stone jars was part of a larger system in Judaism of ceremonies, sacrifices, and rules. These rules included rules on what people could or could not eat.

And elsewhere in the New Testament, in Hebrews, this is written after the death, resurrection, ascension of Jesus.

Probably written around 68 AD. And it's written to Christians who came from Jewish backgrounds. Hebrews, chapter 9, verse 10, says, speaking of these rules and laws, they are only a matter of food and drink and various ceremonial washings, external regulations applying until the time of the new order.

[20 : 04] And then going on a few more verses to chapter 10 in Hebrews, verses 1 and 2, it says that the law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming, not the reality themselves.

For this reason, it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. Otherwise, would they not have stopped being offered?

For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. I mention these because the ceremonial washings were a reminder of people's need to be cleansed, washed of their sins.

But they could never actually cleanse people from their sins. that required a Savior. And now we're starting to get at more of why Jesus' act of turning water into wine at this wedding was more than just a miracle.

It gave the people at the wedding and gives us today a glimpse of who Jesus is and what he came to do. It shows us that Jesus is the promised Messiah who would fulfill Old Testament law and prophecy and give humanity true and lasting cleansing from sin.

[21 : 26] and that he would usher in the promised age to come when good wine would be abundant, when evil would be no more, and when God would be fully among his people.

And we'll talk more about this later. Let's look at verses 7 through 9 in today's passage, but we'll start again at verse 6. Nearby stood six stone jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from 20 to 30 gallons.

Verse 7, Jesus said to the servants, Fill the jars with water. So they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. We'll stop there. All right, let's do some math there. Let's do some math here.

We have six stone jars, each holding from 20 to 30 gallons. So in total, 120 to 180 gallons. And each jar was filled to the brim with water.

[22 : 36] And all of the water became wine. So how much wine are we talking about here? So here is a bottle of wine. It's empty.

This is kind of a standard size bottle of wine. And who knows what's the volume of a standard bottle of wine? Yeah.

750 milliliters. So that's 0.75 liters, which will help us later on because we're going to do some math. So if you bottled all the wine that Jesus made at this wedding, how many bottles of wine would that be?

Okay. Oh, I should have passed out some scratch paper and pencils, but no worries. I did the math for you already. So each jar held between 20 and 30 gallons. Let's pick the lower number, 20 gallons per jar.

That's 120 gallons in total. How many liters is 120 gallons? The answer is 454 liters.

[23 : 39] Now, how many bottles of wine is 454 liters? So 454 divided by 0.75 equals 605.

So that's 605 bottles of wine. That's the low end of this calculation. What about the high end, right? If each jar holds 30 gallons, that's 180 gallons. In total, 180 gallons is equal to how many liters?

681 liters. 681 liters. How many bottles of wine is 681 liters of wine? Okay. Crunch the numbers.

908 bottles of wine. So on the high end, Jesus created 908 bottles of wine. I mean, imagine what that would look like if we saw that. 900 bottles of wine. So I think this little math exercise helps us kind of sense how much wine Jesus produced.

It was exceedingly abundant. So earlier, we talked about the significance of these stone water jars.

[24 : 50] And now we're going to talk about the significance of wine and the significance of this miracle occurring at a wedding. And when we consider all the meaning behind these things, we'll see that truly this was more than a miracle.

It is a sign that gives us a foretaste of the age to come and a glimpse of God's glory. Wedding. Why is it significant that this sign occurred at a wedding?

Jesus could have chosen another setting to display his first sign, the beginning of his signs, but he chose a wedding. wedding. And remember that a sign, I'll put this wine bottle down, remember that a sign is a foretaste of the age to come.

And in several places in the Bible, in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, when Scripture speaks of the age to come, it often uses the language and imagery of wedding and marriage.

For example, in the Old Testament in the book of Hosea, God commands the prophet Hosea to marry a woman that the text describes as a quote, promiscuous woman, unquote, so that their relationship, Hosea's and his wife's relationship, would be a visible illustration of how Israel was unfaithful to God and yet, despite Israel's unfaithfulness, God would be faithful and loving God would reconcile his people to himself and restore them and be with them forever.

[26 : 31] Also in the Old Testament in the book of Isaiah, we find more wedding and marriage-related language and imagery. Okay, if you go to Isaiah 54 verses 5 through 6, Isaiah 54 verses 5 through 6, it says, for your maker is your husband, the Lord Almighty is his name, the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, he is called the God of all the earth.

The Lord will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit. And then, a few chapters later, in Isaiah 62 verse 5, it says, as a young man marries a young woman, so will your builder marry you.

As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you. And moreover, in the Gospels, we see Jesus identified as the groom.

In John chapter 3, John the Baptist refers to Jesus as the bridegroom, and John the Baptist refers to himself as a friend of the bridegroom. In Mark chapter 2, Jesus refers to himself kind of in an indirect way that he is the bridegroom.

And we see from these verses throughout the Bible that God has promised that there will be a time in the future when God will fully be with his people as a groom is with his bride.

[28 : 02] And we see that Jesus is the groom who has inaugurated this restoration of relationship. Now, let's talk about the significance of wine.

Why is it important that Jesus' first sign involves wine? First, let's look at what kind of wine Jesus created. John chapter 2, verse 9.

The master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink.

But you have saved the best till now. What kind of wine did Jesus make? So, we know that this was a big wedding, it was a big event, and they even had a master of the banquet, a professional, a professional in food and drink.

And when he tastes this wine, he calls it the best. Right? He mentions that everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink.

[29 : 27] But you have saved the best till now. The words in our English translation, choice and best, here in this verse, are actually both the same word in Greek, kalos.

And kalos is where we get the name kalista. Kalos, so I looked up this word in a Greek lexicon, and it says that the word kalos was, quote, applied by the Greeks to everything so distinguished in form, excellence, goodness, usefulness, as to be pleasing.

Hence, according to the context, equivalent to beautiful, handsome, excellent, eminent, choice, surpassing, precious, useful, suitable, commendable, admirable, unquote.

So the wine that Jesus has made in exceeding abundance is really, really good wine. It's beautiful, excellent, admirable. Now, more about wine.

In general, what makes good wine even better? Time, age. So what's another, what makes this miracle even more impressive is that Jesus has made new wine, but it tastes really good, as if it's aged wine.

[30 : 51] He's made 900 bottles of wine that somehow paradoxically is both new and aged. Now, to a Jewish person of that time and place who was familiar with Scripture, when you talk about wine that's new and aged, very, very good, and in exceeding abundance, what would that person think of?

They would have remembered Old Testament Scriptures that talked about this kind of wine. They would have remembered, for example, Amos 9 and Isaiah 25.

So Amos 9 verses 13 through 15 say, The days are coming, declares the Lord, when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes.

New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills and I will bring my people Israel back from exile. They will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will plant vineyards and drink their wine.

They will make gardens and eat their fruit. I will plant Israel in their own land, never again to be uprooted from the land I have given them, says the Lord your God.

[32 : 09] Isaiah 25, and I'll read verses 1, 6, and 8. Lord, you are my God. I will exalt you and praise your name, for in perfect faithfulness you have done wonderful things, things planned long ago.

On this mountain, the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats and the finest of wines.

He will swallow up death forever. The sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces. He will remove his people's disgrace from all the earth.

The Lord has spoken. So, let's look at the language in those two passages.

Amos 9 says, the days are coming. So, we know that this is referring to sometime in the future. Then we see language such as, never again to be uprooted, the sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the Lord will swallow up death forever.

[33 : 26] And today when we think of a time that has those three characteristics, when God will wipe away every tear from every eye, when we will never again be uprooted, when death will be no more, what are we thinking of?

We're thinking of the age to come and the kingdom to come, a time and a place where death will be no more, where we will not be exiles or displaced, but we will be fully at home, a place where God will wipe away every tear.

And bringing together all these ideas, plus the idea of wedding and marriage, we turn to the book of Revelation. Your Bible's at the end, and the book of Revelation talks at length about the age to come and the kingdom to come.

And in verse, excuse me, in chapter 21 of Revelation, let me turn there. It says, Revelation 21, then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.

I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, look, God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them.

[34 : 57] They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

Today we've looked at this short passage from the Bible, from John chapter 2, but hopefully we've seen how full of meaning it is, how dense and rich with significance it is.

What Jesus did there was more than a miracle. It was a sign. It gives us a glimpse of God's glory. It gives us a foretaste of the age to come.

When a wedding 2,000 years ago was on the brink of failure because they were about to run out of wine, Jesus performed a small-scale act of salvation by turning gallons of water into gallons of wine, and thereby spared these families from likely lasting shame and preserved their honor.

It was a miracle, but it was more than a miracle, because he gave them and he gives us a foretaste of the age to come and a glimpse of God's glory. The passage in John also says that Jesus was invited to the wedding, and remember it says that Mary told the servants, do whatever he tells you.

[36 : 39] Likewise, we need to invite Jesus into our lives and do what he says. We need to invite Jesus into our lives and do what he says.

And remember what the master of the banquet says after he tastes this water that had been turned into wine. He says, everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink, but you have saved the best till now.

You have saved the best till now. And this reminds us that God's way is not the conventional way. God's timing is not always our timing.

God's ways are unexpected and sometimes contrary to the ways of the world. But when we have experienced and tasted what he has done for us, we will see that his way is the best.

And we will have hope. We have hope because we know that the best is yet to come. When we invite Jesus into our lives and we do what he says, we have hope, we have the promise that the best is yet to come.

[38 : 02] Amen. Amen. Amen.