

The Wedding Party

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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 August Fern, and I am a member of the Berkeley, El Cerrito, Richmond, and Kensington Community Group, but we'll have to let me know.

Today's scripture reading is from the Gospel of John, chapter 2, verses 1 through 11, as printed in your liturgy. A reading from the Gospel according to John. 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 : 1 4] Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for a ceremonial washing, each holding from 20 to 30 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.

This is the gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, O Christ. Good morning. I decided to wear my wine-colored sweater today. Because it was cold and because of this text.

[2 : 1 9] But, you know, if you were here on Christmas Eve, we began that night looking at this gospel of John, the fourth gospel.

And we looked at the prologue, which really kind of tells you everything you need to know about what's coming. And there at the very beginning of John 1, it says, In the beginning was the Word.

The Word was with God. The Word was God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son who is himself God, and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

And see, John, when he begins this gospel, he doesn't bury the lead. Right? He just puts it right there on the front cover, on the top of the page, the most important story, the most essential news, the most crucial information that we need to know.

And basically what John is telling us there, he's saying, if you're a person who wants to know who God is, look at Jesus. And further, John says, if you're a person who wants to know who Jesus is, then follow my gospel, follow my biography of Jesus very, very closely.

[3 : 55] So we get another clue about Jesus at the end of John 1. And if you want to pick up your Bible in the pews, you can see where Jesus says at the end of John 1, he tells one of his newest disciples, a guy named Nathaniel, he says, Nathaniel, you will see heaven open, and you'll see the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

What Jesus is saying there is that to people who are watching with just even a little bit of faith, you'll see that the angels of God are actually going up and they're coming down at the place where Jesus is.

Wherever Jesus is, that's where heaven is opening up. He says that there are going to be all these moments of when the transforming power of God's love bursts into the world where it's as if heaven will be coming down upon the earth.

And this wedding in Cana is such a moment, right, where the Word of God made flesh shows up, where He's present, and wherever He goes, He brings with Him a different dimension of reality.

He brings that into being. He creates new possibilities for people to enjoy the abundant life that comes through Him. And so that's what we're going to look at with this text today.

[5 : 30] We're going to talk about the Lord of the Feast, and then we're going to talk about the hour to come, and we'll close by talking about the foretaste of joy.

So the Lord of the Feast, the hour to come, and the foretaste of joy. But first of all, the Lord of the Feast. When we look at this text starting in verse 1, it says, On the third day, a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee, and Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and His disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

This Cana is a Jewish, little Jewish village. It's about eight miles northeast of Jesus' hometown of Nazareth. So this is the hometown, Cana is the hometown of Nathanael, the latest disciple that Jesus has just called at the end of John chapter 1, and the bride and groom of this wedding are part of Nathanael's extended community, and it seems that Jesus' mother is probably friends with the parents of the bride and the groom, which is why she's so involved in this story.

It's just eight miles away from where she lives. And it's important to remember that, you know, in ancient cultures, and in traditional cultures today, they emphasize the family, they emphasize the community over the individual so that, you know, your meaning in life is not so much found in your individual achievements, the meaning in life is found in being a good husband and a good wife, being a good son and daughter, being a good mother and father.

And the purpose of marriage is not so much the happiness of the two individuals involved in this event, but the purpose of marriage is to bind the whole community together, is to raise up the next generation together.

[7 : 22] And that meant that weddings were quite different than the kind of weddings that we go to today because each wedding was a public feast for the entire town, right?

Because marriage was about the whole community and not just merely this couple. But it did involve the couple, okay? The couple had to be there. And this was the biggest event in their personal life, the personal life of the bride and groom.

This is the day when they come of age. This is the day when they become full adult members of society. And so it's really no surprise that with these ancient wedding feasts, I mean, they didn't just have a day.

They had a week, right? It lasted a whole week long worth of celebration. And when you think about that context, when you think about that background, our text opens abruptly on a great crisis, right?

A massive disaster because we assume that there may be one or two days into this wedding festival and the wine runs out.

[8 : 34] Which essentially means that the party is over. And in an honor-shame culture particularly, this is a disaster, right?

This is a catastrophe. And that's why the mother of Jesus comes to him and wants him to step in, wants him to intervene and to save the situation.

And so it says in verse 3, when the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, they have no more wine. And then if you look down in verse 11, it says, what Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory and his disciples put their faith in him.

And this is the key to understanding this whole text. Right? It's not called merely a miracle. It's called a sign. And a sign is a symbol.

A sign is a signifier. A sign points to something beyond itself. Every day we look at signs. Signs that say, get on here. Get off there.

[9 : 38] Go into this place. Go over there to that place. This signpost at this wedding in Cana reveals the glory of Jesus. Right?

It's this special display of his power that's pointing us to a deeper reality. It's pointing us and saying, this is Jesus' true identity. This is who he is. This is why he came.

And we've got to remember that this is the beginning of Jesus' career. Right? It's the beginning of his public ministry. And so, if you're a candidate for public political office or if you are an entrepreneur and you're wanting to launch your brand, you know, if you're a musician who's releasing a major recording, you are going to choose your first public presentation with enormous care.

Some of you have done this. Right? Every detail that you say, every detail about what you do, it needs to convey the message of who you are and why you're here, what you offer.

Think about Jesus and his calling card. Think about the brand that Jesus is launching. Why would Jesus decide to signify that the main thing that he's all about is throwing a good party?

[11 : 07] Why? The first of all the miracles he could have done, why would this sign that reveals the glory of who he is, why would he decide to bring a supernatural supply of not just quantity wine but quality wine that will sustain a wedding feast?

Why would he do that? I mean, does Jesus not read the newspaper? Is he not aware of all the major threats and crises and dangers that are facing the human race?

Why in the world would Jesus decide not to do something here about disease? Why isn't he doing something right now about hunger or poverty or the climate or death itself?

War? All these problems that we have. When you look at verse 9, it says that we're introduced to this guy who's called the master of the banquet and he's having a very bad day by the way because he's in charge of making sure that all the elements of the celebration, the food, the drink, the music, the entertainment, that all of these things are ready to go and to keep going.

His job is to make the party a wonderful celebration. And so when Jesus comes and he turns the water into wine that brings salvation to this wedding feast, don't you see what Jesus is saying?

[12 : 47] He's saying, I'm the true master of the banquet. I'm the real Lord of the feast. And if you know your Bible, you might say, well, wait a minute, I thought Jesus came to be the word of God made flesh.

I thought he came to humble himself, to take on our sin and our suffering and our sorrow. I thought he came to be rejected and to go to the cross and all these really hard things and sad things.

And that's right, but Jesus in this sign is putting all of that terrible humiliation and all of that awful pain into a larger and much more wonderful context.

He's saying, yes, I'm going to deny myself and yes, I'm going to suffer. Yes, I'm going to sacrificially give my life and all of my followers will give something of themselves as well.

But all that is just a means to a greater end. And the end is the banquet. Right? The end is the feast. The end is the wine.

[13 : 50] The end is the joy. That all of the humiliation and all the pain that I'm going to go through and that my people are going to go through is in order to bring about resurrection.

In order to bring about new creation. Where heaven and earth finally come together. where they intersect and they overlap. And in that moment, I'm going to wipe away all the tears from your eyes.

Right? In that moment, there's going to be no more crying. No more pain. No more tears. There's going to be no more disease and hunger and war and poverty and death.

Right? The old order of things is going to pass away. The new order, the new creation is going to come and when it comes, it will bring about a joy that will absolutely overflow and explode your heart.

You see, Jesus has read his Bible very closely leading up to this moment and he treasures God's word, particularly those places in the Bible that talk about this eternal feast of joy when the Messiah comes.

[15 : 06] And I'll just give you a few examples. This is from Genesis 29. First book in the Bible and it says, the scepter will not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until he to whom it belongs shall come and the obedience of the nation shall be his and get this, it says, he will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch and then it says, he will wash his garments in wine and his robes in the blood of grapes.

What does it mean if you're washing your garments not in water but in wine? What does that mean? That is a sign of extreme abundance.

Extreme riches and wealth and prosperity and blessing, right? I didn't wash my clothes in water, I washed them in wine. Amos chapter 9 says this, it says, the days are coming declares the Lord when the reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes and it says, new wine will drip from the mountains and wine will flow from all the hills.

There will be rivers of wine when the Messiah comes. This is my favorite, Isaiah 20, 25 says this, it says, 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.

It's hard to capture that in English but here it kind of sounds, it rhymes in Hebrew. It sounds like a feast of filet, a banquet of cabernet. Filet mignon, cabernet sauvignon.

[17 : 02] Right? That's what it sounds kind of like in Hebrew. It says, there will be such a feast that the Lord Almighty will prepare for His people that on this mountain at that feast He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all the peoples, the sheet that covers all the nations.

He will swallow up death forever and the sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all their eyes. and He will remove the people's disgrace from all the earth.

And Isaiah says, let us rejoice and be glad in this salvation. Do you see what Jesus is doing? Chez panie and French laundry cannot hold a candle to the coming Messianic feast because it has to do with the wiping away of the tears from our faces.

It has to do with the destruction of death itself. It has to do with the ridding of our disgrace and the salvation of joy and gladness that only the Lord Almighty can accomplish.

Jesus is saying that those who believe in Me can have within them this transporting joy. Right? They can have within them a deep heart fulfillment moment that is not only for later it's for right now.

[18 : 30] That if you trust in Me a stream of joy a river of wine will flow within your heart. At the end of The Lord of the Rings Samwise Gamgee!

wakes up and he realizes he's been rescued from the fires of Mount Doom and he sees that Gandalf is somehow alive and he says Gandalf I thought you were dead but then I thought I was dead and then he says is everything sad going to come untrue?

And what Jesus is saying is that if I'm the master of the banquet who stepped out of eternity and into time if I'm the Lord of the feast who's come down from heaven to earth if I've come to defeat sin and death if I've come to be resurrected and to launch a new creation then you can be sure that everything sad is going to come untrue.

You can be sure that everything wrong is going to be put right. You can be sure that the wine is going to flow without ever coming to an end.

Dostoevsky put it like this. I know a few of you are reading or would like to read the Brothers Karamazov. Dostoevsky says I believe like a child that suffering will be healed and made up for that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage like the despicable fabrication of the impotent and infinitely small Euclidean mind of man that in the world's finale at the moment of eternal harmony something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts for the comforting of all resentments for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity for all the blood that they've shed that it will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened.

[20 : 34] I want to encourage us not to sentimentalize this wedding at Cana to think that Jesus has just come to save this family from social shame or to think that he's just come to make this little Jewish community happy for a few more days of wedding celebrations because what Jesus is saying is that I am the Lord of the feast that's my calling card that is my brand my first sign to reveal my glory is that I've come to bring joy to the whole world and I've come to take this sad and miserable world and set everybody laughing again that's what I've come to do so that's point number one the Lord of the feast point number two is the hour to come the hour to come you know Jesus adorns the institution of marriage with his presence with his action at this wedding as if to say and I think he's very intentional in doing what he did where he did it as if to say that the creator

God's original design and direction for male-female relationships and for families at the beginning is very very good Jesus is going to go on and he's going to elevate our vision of marriage and our vision of singleness in the kingdom of God but the main point of our text is not so much about our marriages in our extended families the main point of our text is about the marriage covenant between God and his people throughout the Old Testament we hear about God as the bridegroom and his people as the bride that God is such that he wants a love relationship with us like a husband and a wife have with each other he wants that profound permanent union and intimacy and joy of bride and groom and this is why when Jesus comes he refers to himself over and over as the bridegroom he says in Matthew 22 the kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son the apostles pick this up in Ephesians 5

Paul talks about Jesus being the husband who gives himself up for his bride the church and the very end of the Bible carries this image all the way to the end it says there's going to be a great heavenly wedding feast that's prepared at the end of time it's called the marriage supper of the lamb and it says that the people of God will be like a bride that's dressed for her husband and the question when you look at that whole arc of scripture the question is how will that be like how will that happen how will Jesus come and bring about the wedding of God and humanity how will he bring about the marriage of union and intimacy and joy between God and his people and that's what brings us to this tense and somewhat awkward conversation that Jesus has with his mother because she comes and she tells Jesus she says the wine has run out and Jesus says woman why do you involve me and that seems a little strange right it seems kind of cold and insensitive like the fifth commandment of the ten commandments is honor your mother honor your father and I went and I looked for like more nuanced and softer translations of this and I couldn't find any they all basically say the same thing but we know that in the gospels

Jesus is not easily irritated right we know that he never says things that he regrets and has to come back and say I'm sorry for that we know that even when he was tortured he didn't say harsh and angry words so what in the world is going on here well something something's weighing heavily upon Jesus at this wedding it says in verse 4 woman why do you involve me Jesus replied my hour has not yet come and if you read the gospel of John closely Jesus refers to this hour many times and every time he's speaking about the coming hour of his death right his hour is the moment of his death on the cross now how does this make any sense his mother Mary says help there's a disaster they've run out of wine and Jesus says why are you telling me this I'm not ready for my hour of death I'm not ready to die and it just seems like a non sequitur what is Jesus thinking at this moment what he's thinking is I'm about to perform a powerful sign of what I've come to do and what is needed what is needed to turn the misery and the sadness of this world into joy what is needed to bring

God and his people together like bride and groom what is going to have to happen for that to transpire and Jesus is thinking it's the coming hour of my death and we don't know how much Mary understood this in the moment but she understood enough to say in verse 5 she tells the servants do whatever he tells you I know enough to say do whatever Jesus tells you to do next and it says in verse 6 nearby stood six stone water jars the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing each holding from 20 to 30 gallons and Jesus said to the servants fill the jars with water so they filled them to the brim and then he told them now draw out some and take it to the master of the banquet why would Jesus create new wine in jars that are used by Israel for ceremonial washing why use jars for ceremonial cleansing and purification is this a total accident is this complete coincidence no what Jesus is communicating here is that what the hour of my death is all about is the kind of washing that will make possible the union of God and his people in intimacy and love and joy and if you know your Old Testament like Jesus did you know it contains many many rights and regulations of purification that what was required were many and various courses of cleansing that point us to our most basic spiritual need right these washings vividly got across the idea that God is holy

[27 : 42] God is righteous God is perfect that we are stained we're polluted we're deeply flawed and that in order to even come in contact with him much less become his spouse become his bride there needs to be some kind of cleansing some kind of purification right some kind of atonement and pardon we cannot just walk right into the presence of a holy God as we are and so Israel had these many purification rights that led up to their blood sacrifices and that's what these jars are normally used for and by employing these jars that are used for ceremonial washing Jesus is saying that he's come into the world to accomplish in the hour of his death once and for all what all the ceremonial and sacrificial laws of the Old Testament are pointing to that we can't really understand the wedding feast of marital union and intimacy and joy with God that Jesus came to bring without the hour of his death and the way that his death was to deal with our sin you see instead of

Jesus telling us that sin doesn't really exist and you're all pretty much okay the way you are Jesus in his entire ministry his entire teaching he's telling us you're defiled by sin you need to be rescued and purified from sin and there's this interesting statement at the end of John chapter 2 he says it says many people believed in his name but Jesus would not entrust himself to them for he knew what was in them what does Jesus know about what's in us what is in us it's this capacity for self-centeredness it's in all that we think and all that we say and all that we do to serve ourselves it's this dark power that causes us to love ourselves more than we love God to love ourselves more than we love our neighbor and the consequence of all that is that we are alienated from God and we're enslaved to ourselves and we're in conflict with each other and so when Jesus says to his mother my hour has not yet come he's saying he's saying woman

I can bring the wine I can bring the joy of the great wedding feast to this world and I can unite God as the bridegroom with his people as the bride in a relationship of loyal love I can cleanse them from their sin and their selfishness and their guilt and their shame but oh dear woman I'm going to have to die to do it he says mother for my people to drink the cup of wedded love and marital joy with God I'm going to have to drink the cup of their sin and their death how does Jesus bring us joy by losing his joy by going to the cross and dying in our place friends Jesus at this moment of great joy in the midst of a wedding feast he's thinking about his death which means that he's thinking about his death all the time every moment of every day Jesus has not come to be a good teacher or a moral exemplar or a social reformer he came to die he came he came for the hour of his death to shed his blood to take that cup of God's justice and his punishment so that we could raise the cup of God's love and God's joy it's the greatest love story ever told the bridegroom came to win the heart of his bride by giving his life up for her and every love story that you enjoy it's just a hint it's a whisper it's a sign post to this love story and the hour that Jesus knows is coming to win the love of his bride so we talked about the Lord of the feast we talked about the hour to come and I want to just close briefly talking about the foretaste of joy the foretaste of joy our text says that the wine is gone the wine ran out the wine was no more and that's the one thing that you can be sure about in this life that no matter how secure you feel no matter how healthy you are no matter how much wealth you've accumulated no matter the successes you've had no matter the relationships that you enjoy the wine will eventually run out every joy will be gone every celebration will come to an end it will not last just as the wine at this wedding failed but the message of the gospel is that with Jesus there's a different reality he says they filled the jars to the brim this is 180 gallons which is about a thousand bottles of wine that is a ridiculous amount of wine that's way more wine than they were going to drink that's way more wine than they needed and it indicates to us the overflowing nature of God's generosity toward us the inexhaustible bounty and the abundant life that Jesus wants to pour out on his people for us to enjoy if we'll just trust and obey that he can do it and we notice in the story that the majority of the guests they're clueless the guests are here they're enjoying the best wine that they've ever had the best wine that they could ever imagine drinking but they have no idea where it's come from they don't even know who to thank only the servants who obeyed the command of Jesus only the disciples they're the only ones who know the secret and it says in verse 11 that through the sign

Jesus revealed his glory and his disciples put their faith in him that's the pattern the disciples behold the sign and they believe in Jesus this is the invitation and the challenge to all who would read this gospel behold the signs of Jesus believe in the person of Jesus pay attention to the wonderful works of Jesus and then put the full weight of your trust on Jesus and it poses this question to us as we close are you a wedding guest who does not know the glory of Jesus and does not believe in Jesus or are you a servant and a disciple who wholeheartedly entrusts yourself to Jesus and if you consider yourself a disciple I want to encourage you as we close to think about the wine of holy communion for a moment this table we're about to come to Jesus the one thing he gave us to keep remembering him by is this feast where we're to keep coming to him our living

Lord we're to keep taking the blood of the true vine we're to keep drinking the wine of his joy we're to keep abiding in him whose blood of the new covenant he poured out to give life to the whole world and as we come to this feast we've got to remember that in the midst of the joy of that that wedding feast in Cana right when everybody is enjoying themselves while everybody's having the best wine of their life Jesus in that moment he's tasting the coming hour of his death that lays before him but we don't have to do that right Jesus sat amidst all the joy of that wedding feast and he was sipping the coming sorrow so that today you and I who believe in Jesus we can sit amidst all the world's sorrow and there's so much sorrow but we can be sipping the coming joy every time we come to the

[36 : 14] Lord's supper by faith we get a foretaste of that coming feast and that coming joy so that even those of us who right now are in the midst of some deep sorrow some terrible suffering you can come to Jesus and you can sip the wine of the joy that's coming for you and if you know that if that's the thing that you possess today that will enable you to go out and put into practice these very simple words of Jesus mother when she says in verse five do whatever he tells you to do and that's the question as we come to this feast is the attitude and the heart by which you approach the Lord at his table are you saying to Jesus I'm listening to everything you're telling me everything you're saying in your word I'm listening and whatever you tell me to do that's what

I want to do right your wish is my command I'm going to trust you I'm going to obey you whatever you tell me to do is that how you come to this table because that's the faith that Jesus requires of his disciples the servants show us that it's only through trusting!

obedience in the Lord that we will actually experience his power the only way we can really experience his mysterious wonder working power in our lives is not just to hear the word of Jesus but to obey Jesus fill the jars draw some out take it to the party they've got to obey him in all the particulars and all the details and it's only when we step out in faith and we obey Jesus in the particulars and in the details that he will enable us to experience firsthand a different dimension of reality but you have to step out in faith you have to obey if you want to experience all the new possibilities of abundant life that he's offering to you so friends when you come to the Lord of this table are you ready to do whatever he says are you ready to respond to him with wholehearted trust and unwavering obedience are you ready to rejoice that whatever we're about to taste here at this table is just a foretaste that

Jesus likes to hold out the choicest wine for last and that means that when we come we're remembering the best is yet to come I'm sipping the coming joy of the kingdom of God the banquet the feast that God has prepared for me let's come with that spirit and that attitude and that heart in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit Amen