

John 2:1-11
January 16, 2022

One of the interesting features of the gospel of John is that it changes the name of what in the other gospels are called, “mighty deeds,” or more often translated as “miracles.” John calls them, “signs,” which means they point beyond themselves. Another interesting feature is that in the synoptic gospels (a name which acknowledges the similarities between Matthew, Mark, and Luke), the miracles more often than not involve a healing, or the casting out of a demon, or the resuscitation of a person from death, or a natural phenomenon like the calming of the storm; something in which high stakes are held, matters of life and death.

But here in John the first sign, while it may affect how this certain wedding host came to be regarded by his peers, was certainly not a matter of life and death. It involved changing water to wine to enhance the enjoyment of a wedding celebration, and help the host save face. It seems to have held less weight than the other miracles, and as well, the other signs in the Gospel of John, which include the Feeding of the Multitude, the Healing of the Man Born Blind, and the Raising of Lazarus.

What makes it even more strange to those of us who have been raised in the baptist tradition is that many baptists have historically been teetotalers. I was raised in such a strain of the baptist movement that frowns not only on excess, but on any kind of indulgence.

Growing up, I remember being told that Jesus would never have changed water into wine or any other alcoholic beverage (because, of course, Jesus was a good baptist), therefore, these jars must have been filled with sparkling grape juice, or some other non-alcoholic drink. It seems a little funny now.

In the grand scheme of things, the failure of a host who has invited guests, to provide enough food and drink seems less consequential than, say, a hospital that runs out of medicine, or a power company that runs out of power. Jesus saves the host from an *embarrassment*, but even 2,000 years ago an embarrassment is less important than something that affected life at its most basic level. No one would have died for lack of wine. They would have complained. Not that an embarrassment is of no importance at all, but one can see the difference.

So why *this* story at the beginning of *the* story about Jesus? On the heels of Incarnation and Baptism, why a wedding banquet? One hears all kinds of interpretations about Jesus affirming the wondrous side of earthly life, about being truly human and participating in the celebration of life’s stages and accomplishments. But in those interpretations the question is not really addressed.

Even Jesus resists, and only performs this sign at the bequest of his mother, who was apparently friends with the host, and did not really give him a choice. “Do what he says,” she tells the servants, not paying attention to his objection.

Of course, the account is not the only reference to weddings in the New Testament, or in the words of Jesus. He tells parables about weddings. In one, guests are invited but refuse to come because they all have other things to do. The host then sends out servants into the highways and byways looking for just about anyone to invite.

In another, bridesmaids await the arrival of the groom and when he shows up late at night, half of them haven't any oil in their lamps. When they get back from the store, they are locked out of the party for lack of preparedness.

In Pauline references Jesus is pictured as the groom and the church is the bride and the idea is of a grand wedding banquet, The Marriage Supper of the Lamb," as it has been called, and it is a part of the larger understanding of the consummation of the age, the final judgment. The Wedding at Cana, and all other weddings actually, is a sign that acts as a foretelling of the great banquet at the end of time at which the reconciliation between the Divine and the human is celebrated.

To what end? Certainly it is not merely to have a good time. Rather, what is presented is Eternal life and death, not the kind of death we all face that involves the death of our bodies, but the death . . . or life of the essential being that is each of us. It means there is a great hope, and to that hope we are called; to lead lives of goodness and honesty, courage and

compassion, sacrifice and love, as a way of preparing ourselves for the great banquet. And when we find ourselves short of the mark, it means we are met with kindness and mercy. The implications stagger the imagination and boggle the mind. No wonder it will be celebrated like a marriage.

Gracious and Almighty God,

Accept our gratitude and praise, as we come to you in this time of prayer. In these stressful times we are tempted to anxiety and frustration, and the pre-occupation with selfish thoughts.

We are concerned about personal situations; about the ramifications of the ongoing pandemic; There are some in our congregation who are bereaved, we pray comfort and strength for the family of Ardith Salyer, help them to grieve, O Lord, as it is said, as those who have hope.

Nurture in us gratitude, empathy and compassion. Give us peace in our hearts. Strengthen our faith. Guide us in the path of wisdom. Reassure us of your love for us and presence.

We pray for our country and its leaders, and those who serve.

We offer now our petitions, confessions, and intercessions:

Perfect Light of revelation, as you have shone us in the life of Jesus, whose epiphany we celebrate, so shine in us and through us, that we may become beacons of truth and compassion, enlightening all creation with deeds of justice and mercy, in your name.

Let us pray as Jesus taught his disciples

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