

Ordinary Water/Extraordinary Wine

This morning if you would take your new pew Bibles, and turn with me to the gospel of John, Chapter 2.

I have been waiting to say that since the new Bibles got her the week before COVID, and today I finally get to say it. If you forgot your glasses or thought the scripture would show up on the screen, I will help you out...

The Gospel of John Chapter 2, verses 1-11

2 On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴ "Woman,^[a] why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.^[b]

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, ⁹ 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 ¹⁰ 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."

¹¹ 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.

Today, we are looking at chapter 2, at the first miracle that John records. I've entitled my sermon this morning,

"Ordinary Water/Extraordinary Wine."

Now some of you are wondering, why we are having a different format for the service, why we are meeting upstairs later in the gym, why we are having a catered lunch, why are we celebrating Fat Tuesday after Lent is long over with, and why we are having a party.

Those are fair questions, but aren't we as Christians the people who have the most to celebrate? Which is why I picked John 2 as our scripture this morning, a

scripture where we find Jesus at a celebration, just as we will shortly be celebrating.

The circumstances surrounding this first miracle were quite ordinary. We see that Jesus was invited to a wedding feast in a small town a few miles away from his hometown of Nazareth. It was an ordinary wedding for common, ordinary people. The bride and groom are not named in the story because nobody John was writing to would have known who they were anyway. Jesus' first miracle did not occur at a royal wedding. It did not occur in Jerusalem. It occurred in a little insignificant village named Cana.

Why is that important for you and me to know? Because our family here at Aldersgate is made up of relatively insignificant people as far as the world is concerned. This story tells us a lot about Jesus' attitude toward us and His priorities. It tells us that, yes, the Son of God will step into our little part of the world and will work a miracle in our time of need. In fact, I believe Jesus delights in reaching down to help people and lifting them up. We as a congregation here at Aldersgate have experienced that first hand, we know that Jesus was there to lift us up in our hour of need and that is why we are having a party after the service this morning.

At the time of our Bible story, it was Jewish tradition for weddings, that following a long procession from the bride's house to the groom's house, there was a wedding feast which could go on for days. I suspect that there was some form of ceremony, but nothing is recorded in the text about it. Only the party is mentioned by John. There was a great time to be had by all- at least until the wine runs out.

So, Jesus steps in to help. Which is probably the key point of the message: **Life's problems will overwhelm us without the help of Jesus!** Think about that simple fact. How often do we try to face the obstacles that overwhelm us alone? I think wise people have learned that the answer is when you need help, get Jesus involved.

I think there are four lessons and four conclusions to be reached from this story.

Our first lesson today is that we learn that Jesus meets us in our time of need. Jesus Christ was on a mission TO SAVE THE WORLD ! Yet along the way, he took time to attend a wedding. I wonder how often we forget to take time out from our work to be part of someone else's special occasion. For Jesus, this was a part of his mission as these occasions involved "people" and people are why Jesus came!

The second lesson we learn today is that Jesus cares about our everyday needs. He cares about all our needs, not just our spiritual needs. He cares about people being unnecessarily hurt. He cares about people enjoying themselves. After all he is a God of joy, and he has come to share it freely. It seems to me that all too often, we think Jesus only cares about how holy we are, how long we pray or our good works.

I have come to the conclusion that Jesus cares just as much about the small details of our lives as the big. Because while wine may seem like a trivial need on some levels, it was very important to this newly married couple and to Mary. Remembering that Jesus did not have to turn the water to wine and save this couple and their family the embarrassment of a failed wedding feast, but He did.

In our third lesson we learn that Jesus transforms our everyday experiences. Jesus did not come to give us information; he came to give us a transformation. Jesus changes things. He has a way of taking the ordinary and making it extraordinary. He did not come to bring new ideas; he came to make new people. The water did not just appear to be wine; it was transformed into wine- indeed the very best wine.

Some people have trouble believing this miracle is important, but that is because they don't understand the kind of God we have. You see, our God is in the real transformation business. The world wants us to get a new hairdo or a new wardrobe, to help us lose weight or get a face lift. But Jesus does not want to change your looks, he wants to change your heart. He doesn't want to give you a new suit; he wants to make you a new person. He does not want to rearrange you, he wants to transform you. He doesn't want you to just "appear" to have your life in order; he wants to reorder your priorities and to make you totally different person.

And in our fourth lesson we learn in this gospel story that Jesus provides extravagantly for even ordinary requests. There were six water jars made to contain between 20 and 30 gallons a piece. So, at the very least, the jars contained 120 gallons of wine, and as much as 180 gallons. That is a lot of wine. With that much new wine the party was going to last a long time! I suspect there was probably more extraordinary wine that the guests could drink.

Why did Jesus give so much wine? Because he never gives just enough; he always gives abundantly. This is the same thing Jesus did when he fed the multitude. He multiplied five loaves and two fish so that 5,000 men and their families were fed.

And when everyone had eaten their fill, there were twelve baskets of bread and fish left over. He gave them more than they could possibly eat. But we know here at Aldersgate that is the way God gives. Jesus said, *“I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10). We serve an extravagant God who lavishes us with his blessings.

So, I’d offer these four conclusions this morning for times when we face problems.

FIRST. Admit that there is a problem. The fact is that the wine had run out, and the party was going to bomb. Mary could have ignored the problem, but that wouldn’t have changed anything. It’s sort of like a group of people sitting in a circle with an elephant in the middle. Casual conversation takes place until one person blurts out, “what about the elephant.”

We can pretend our lives are fine- “How are you today? Great, praise the Lord! How about you?”- No one ever says, “My faith is weak, I’m struggling in my marriage, and I’m involved in some pretty bad things right now.” Let’s be real with each other today and every day. No one has their life all together! We all have problems, individually and as a church! Let’s admit that, support each other, get stronger, and move forward.

SECOND. Bring the problem to Jesus. When Mary realized that there was a problem, she made smart decision to take the problem to Jesus. The fact that Mary took the problem to Jesus indicates she believed He could resolve the problem, so she identified the problem and waited for him to handle it, confident that all would be well.

When I think about this, I wonder if when Mary took the problem to Jesus if she was remembering the promises from when Jesus was born. Remembering that the child she bore would be the Messiah and if she thought that now, since Jesus had started his ministry and called his own disciples, that he was ready to fulfill his destiny.

Just as significant though was that I believe that the miracle only happened because Jesus was present. He was there, at this wedding because He was invited to come. Have you invited Jesus into your house to transform your marriage from water to wine, to work miracles in your kids, miracles in your finances?

The key to the miraculous is the presence of Jesus. That's what we want more than anything else in this house-His presence- not just as a guest, but as Mary learned how to accept-as Lord and Savior.

THIRD. Confidently trust his provision. Notice, even when it appears that Jesus is unconcerned about the need, Mary has faith. She instructs the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them to do. And Jesus responds to her faith.

Then notice what Jesus does. He gives instructions to be followed. But there is no prayer. There is no word of command. There is no laying on of hands. There is no binding of Satan. There is no crying out or hocus-pocus. Nothing. Jesus does not even taste the wine to see if it really happened. The miracle is done without drawing attention to himself.

And I suspect that is the way most miracles occur. God works to meet a practical, everyday need in a very anonymous way. He responds to our faith. Because Faith is fighting your way through a crowd to touch the hem of His garment. Because Faith is letting your friend down through the roof of a house so he could get next to Jesus. Because Faith is rolling the stone away from the tomb so a man dead for days can walk out. Because Faith always involves taking a risk, and with that risk comes the chance that you will be exposed to ridicule or criticism. But from our experience here at Aldersgate we have learned that the rewards of faith always outweigh the risks.

FOURTH. Do whatever Jesus tells you to do to fix the problem. The Bible records that there were 6 stone pots there. Their purpose was to hold water that the Jews could use for purification. People would come to the pots and let water run over their hands. It wasn't a matter of sanitation but of ceremony. It was required by the Jewish law. It did nothing to clean them physically or to wash them spiritually. It was simply an outward show.

An outward show, then or now, has never been able to produce real joy. Simply coming to church, praying or reading the Bible will not produce joy in you. It will put you in the place where you can find joy, and it will put you around the people who will help enhance your joy. But if you come to church and never put into practice the things you hear there, you will miss the point and waste your time.

Here the servants not only heard Jesus speak, they responded in obedience. They began the process of filling the stone jars with water. Remember each of these jars held between 20 and 30 gallons of water, and there were 6 jars. That's 180 gallons

of water. It would have taken a lot of time and energy to accomplish this task. Trip after trip to the well to draw water and pour it into the jars.

Remember Duties are ours. Miracles are God's. It is Christ's part to make the water wine. It is our job to be faithful to do what we are told to do-fill the water pots and leave the miracle to God. We don't need to understand everything in the Bible before we can start obeying it. We just need to DO what we KNOW, and the more we DO...the more JOY we will find.

Remember Jesus used what was available to Him-six common water pots. He didn't send out for containers made of silver or gold. He used the clay pots that were available. He used the ordinary to accomplish the extraordinary.

Remember also that Jesus involved other people in the process. Could Jesus have done the miracle without them? Of course, He could have. But God wants to involve us in what He is doing- for our own sake. Because we are changed in the process of serving.

Recall that Jesus chose a bunch of nobody's to get the job done. We who filled water jugs don't know who those waiters were. But they know, and I suspect they will forever live with the joy and satisfaction of being a part of what Jesus was doing. The miracle involved a lot of hard work. Anybody who has ever carried much water knows how heavy it is. These six large clay pots held about 180 gallons of water. At 8.3 pounds per gallon of water that is a lot of work. Why did they have to work so hard? Again, because Jesus wanted ordinary people to be part of the process.

Conclusion: In his letter John says that the miracle at the wedding was a sign- the Greek word is "semeion". A word John used to indicate that this miracle was designed to point to something, which in this case was the deity of Christ. Because these signs were intended to convey a message that would otherwise be known. That is the purpose of this miracle, to dramatize the glory of Christ, and how the glory of Christ has the power to transform.

And as a result of this miracle, the scripture says that the disciples put their trust in Jesus. Up to this point, the disciples were following Jesus around based mostly on the recommendation of John the Baptist. Now the disciples knew and trusted, and they put their faith in Jesus, because Jesus' power and glory were now revealed to them.

You see I have come to the conclusion that there were actually two miracles that happened at that wedding. The first was the changing of water into wine so that a celebration could continue.

But the second was much more significant. In the second miracle, the hearts of Jesus' disciples were changed from curious followers to believing disciples.

Once a Sunday School teacher asked her students: "What is your favorite Bible Story?" Many of them liked the old classics—David and Goliath, Jonah and the whale, and Jesus walking on water. However, one little girl answered: "The wedding at Cana." The teacher was curious about her answer and asked her why. The girl's answer pleasantly surprised her teacher: "I like it because I want to have Jesus at my wedding too."

At the beginning of this message this morning I mentioned that some of you were probably wondering, why we were sharing lunch and having a party on Sunday morning. I suspect you have all figured it out by now, and I am confident that you not only figured it out but that you recognized part of our story here at Aldersgate in the story of this miracle.

Ten years ago, we were ordinary people with ordinary problems, attendance was sad, the church building needed renovation, and giving and the budget were a constant concern. I am not positive we were a friendly church; we certainly weren't as friendly and welcoming as we are now. I don't think we had a vision for the future, and I remember that Pastor Heikes would often find himself alone for the children's message. At Leadership meetings we were talking about selling the building or doing without a full-time pastor to save money.

It was at this point in our history that members of Aldersgate began to speak out. Talking about change, work in the community, and visioning for the future. It was at this point that I think we realized that we had reached the end of our resources and began to realize that we always needed was guidance and assistance from Jesus. I think that what we realized was that our priority had to be inviting Jesus to the party, to his party, because after all the whole idea of Aldersgate was Jesus.

And that is the miracle that changed the very nature of Aldersgate, because it was then that Jesus met us where we were, in our hour of need. And in doing that we changed, we began to celebrate the special occasions and strengths of our members, we made people our priority, and suddenly we had a motto, a mantra,

“Welcome Home To Aldersgate”. We were witnesses and willing participants when Jesus came to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary.

As a church family we brought our problems to Jesus, we admitted that we had issues we could not resolve without help- we were honest about our situation, about where we stood. And we understood for a change to occur, that Jesus expected us to follow his directions, expected us to do his work, expected us to be part of his solution. And in doing that we learned two very important lessons, first, Jesus responds to Faith, and secondly, that God provides abundantly.

Look what we have accomplished in the last 5 years. We decided to buy a parsonage we couldn't afford, we raised a down payment, we paid off the mortgage in a year, we renovated the church building, we cleaned and painted just about every surface in the building, we found the money for a youth director and put together a successful youth program, we took care of each other when things got hard. Even when a pastor left unexpectedly, we carried on with 16 different people delivering the message over a 6-month period, only three of whom were clergy. Small groups flourished, there was outreach in the community, finances are sound, the music program can only be described as dynamic, we came through COVID, and later this week we welcome a new pastor, Seth Leypoldt, to our family.

We learned that when we asked for help and stepped out in faith, that we were transformed from the ordinary into the extraordinary. And that is the first reason why we celebrate today, we celebrate all that we have accomplished as a family here at Aldersgate.

And then we need to recognize that our work has only just begun and the second reason we celebrate today, is for all that we will accomplish in the future. This morning we celebrate that future, we celebrate the way we will continue to care for each other, we celebrate the lost and struggling we will reach, and we celebrate the work that we do.

Now that we like the couple in Cana have invited Jesus to the wedding.

AMEN.