# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“A Wedding Celebration”**

**John 2:1-11**

**January 20, 2019**

Who is Jesus? This, we have said, is the question that John addresses in his gospel. Out of the many hundreds, perhaps thousands, of events in the earthly life of Jesus, John chooses to share with us those which best help us to know who Jesus is, that we may believe in him and have life in his name. In this morning’s passage, John has chosen to share with us the event of Jesus attending a wedding celebration during which he turns water into wine. I invite you to turn with me to John 2:1-11

The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus’ mother told him, “They have no more wine.” “Dear woman, that’s not our problem,” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.” But his mother told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” When the jars had been filled, he said, “Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies.” So the servants followed his instructions. When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. “A host always serves the best wine first,” he said. “Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!” This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

John calls this event in the life of Jesus a miraculous sign. Turning water into wine is a miracle, and the miracle impacts those who are present – there is wine, the wine is really good wine, and there is lots of it. But the miracle is also a sign, and this is how the event helps us to know deeper truth about Jesus.

In the other gospels – Matthew, Mark and Luke – we read that Jesus told called parables, stories about everyday events that were intended to convey spiritual truth. A farmer goes out to sow seed; some falls on good soil, some on poor soil, and some on the hard soil of the road – an everyday event. Jesus then explains to his disciples that the deeper meaning of the story helps us to understand something about God. God is like a farmer who sows the Good News of Jesus Christ throughout the world. Some receive the Good News and believe (the good soil); some receive it and it has an initial impact in their life but then the cares of the world crowd out the message (the poor soil); and, some hear it and disregard it (the hard soil). Unlike those gospel writers, John does not so much choose stories that Jesus tells but events that Jesus performs to be the signs that help us understand the deeper truth about who Jesus really is. Yes, he can turn water into wine, but that pales in importance when compared to what else he can do.

Jesus is attending a wedding and something goes wrong. As a pastor I have had the privilege of officiating at many weddings, and one of the realities of these ceremonies is that there always seems to be at least one thing that goes wrong. When I meet with the couple for pre-marital counseling, I make it a point to tell them that I have never been to a perfect wedding, and theirs probably won’t be the first. Pastors enjoy sharing their wedding stories with each other, and a friend of mine shared this one with me: as the bride was preparing for the wedding she told the pastor that she was extremely nervous about the idea of being married. Hoping to encourage her during the wedding service, the pastor decided to ask the best man to read a verse from the First Letter of John, chapter four, verse eighteen, which says, “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.” Unfortunately, the best man was not very familiar with the Bible and read instead from the Gospel of John, chapter four, verse eighteen, which says, “You have had five husbands, and the man you now live with is not your husband.”

The wedding in Cana was not a perfect wedding either, but theirs was a much bigger problem that reading the wrong verse from the Bible. Jewish wedding celebrations typically lasted up to a week, and it was the groom’s family’s responsibility to ensure that there was plenty of food and wine for the entire time. At this wedding they had run out of wine, and once they ran out of wine the celebration would be over. Having no wine, the guests would begin to leave. Instead of being joyful about the new life begun by the young couple, they would be displeased by the failure to provide for them. How would this wedding be remembered by friends and family? As the wedding where they ran out of wine. Thankfully, Jesus steps in and the potential disaster is averted.

The miracle of Jesus turning water into wine is a sign that points us to three critical truths about who Jesus is. First, we discover that he can bring about transformation. Water becoming wine shows that Jesus has authority over the natural world, and it is a sign pointing to the truth that he has authority over the spiritual world, as well. He can take a substance, water, and turn it into something completely different. He can make it into a new thing. Similarly, he can take a human person and turn that person into something brand new. The Apostle Paul puts the truth this way in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “If anyone believes in Christ, that person is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come.”

The second truth about Jesus that we discover in this miraculous sign is that the new is much better than the old. When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that Jesus had turned into wine, he was amazed. You can imagine him taking the cup from the servants and sipping it, then swirling it around, smelling it, drinking it again, like a seasoned wine connoisseur, and saying: “This is the best wine I have ever tasted.” When we believe in Jesus and trust him enough to surrender our life to him, we are transformed into something new, and God’s intent is to make the new life we now live be much better than anything we have ever experienced before. He wants us to experience the very best kind of life there is, a life of love and peace and joy. A life where the celebration never ends, for the wine will never run out.

This brings us to the third truth about Jesus revealed by the sign, the truth of abundance. Jesus says in John 10:10, “I have come to give you life, and to give it in all its abundance.” Jesus turns somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons of water into wine. That’s a lot of wine – that’s enough wine to last a good long time. God is not skimpy when it comes to giving us his good gifts. There is plenty, more than enough to go around, an abundance that will allow everyone who has been transformed, who has been changed into someone new, to experience the benefits of that new life for all eternity.

Jesus was a guest at a wedding celebration, but his mere presence was not enough to make a difference. They needed to do whatever he told them to do, no matter how unusual. To fill these six water jars with water would have taken some work. There was no hose to hook up to the spigot – they had to haul all that water from the village well, something they had already done once to provide the water for the ceremonial washing of the guests when they first came to the wedding. But, they obeyed, and a miracle of transformation took place. What does Jesus tell us that we need to do to be a part of his transformation, to enjoy a new life that far outshines the old, to experience God’s abundance? Believe the Good News that he is who he says he is and will do what he says he will do.

When the disciples saw the miraculous sign, they believed more deeply in him than before. Here was one who could take a commonplace thing, simple water, and make of it wine, make it a source of joy and a revelation of his glory. Jesus is able to take the humdrum, commonplace, ordinary, normal events of any life and with his touch make them full of flavor, strength and beauty; to turn them into wine. He will do this with any of us as we faithfully walk with him, follow him, and place our trust in him. That is what the wedding in Cana reveals to us about Jesus.