

Wine Knot, Whine Not
John 2: 1-11
Gilroy Presbyterian Church, Gilroy, CA
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There was a birthday card that hung in a wine cellar which was about three people wine tasting and sharing their experience. The first took a sip and said “Full Bodied but not overbearing,” the second takes a drink and exclaims, “Bitter but not precocious” and the third swirls his enthusiastically and marvels, “Crappy but free.” (First slide) We have to wonder what were the words of the wine steward at the wedding of Cana when he knows the wedding has run out of wine but when given the sudden appearance of this new wine, he dips in and tastes it? He is perplexed and amazed at the same time.

The story today is of the first public miracle in Jesus’s ministry. He has just been with John in the wilderness and makes a three day journey to Galilee, presumable to attend this wedding. Since Jesus’s mother and all the disciples were invited it must have been someone who was close to all of them, and someone known to the whole town. The guests were enjoying themselves at the party and the wine has run out. Mary goes to talk with Jesus about the situation and Jesus speaks to his mother, “why does this concern you or me?” Mary then tells the servants to do what Jesus asks. And he turns water into wine. Not like a case of wine, he takes 6 vessels which hold 20-30 gallons a piece. (Second slide) How did the servants even get that much water into them, it’s not like they had a tap or hose to just turn on to fill these vessels first, they had to hand carry all that water to fill the jugs. Then the dazed and confused the wine steward dips some of that water out and there is wine, not just any wine, but Wine Spectator’s 100-point pinot. And behold the party continues on.

(Wedding mishaps). Have you ever been to a wedding where something has gone wrong? In officiating weddings over the years there have been plenty of incidents to choose from. Shared here are a few mishaps. The bride being too drunk to walk down the aisle, the ring bearer walking down the aisle and roaring at the crowd like a lion, a bridesmaid’s zipper malfunctioning and having to be sewn into her dress, the groom arriving an hour late to the wedding with ½ a sound system that he was going to sing to his bride and he was going

to go back for the other 1/2, the ring flying from the grooms fingers only to bounce down the 1 inch gap next to the organ. Rounding the corner in the country to find the whole wedding party in their underwear as the bride said not to get dressed before they got to church. Arriving to the bride's mother having fallen flat on her face at the church and her nose was as big as an apple. Or how about 25 inches of snow which kept most of the guest's home from the Fullers wedding? We all probably have memories of little mishaps at weddings we have been too as well.

But here is Jesus who has walked three days to get to this important celebration and it is about to end because the wine has run out. Why are the water and the wine so important in this miracle story? What is it that happens when Jesus is around? And what is the gift that Jesus brings to this wedding?

Derek Mims our friend and wine distributor in Sonoma had this to say. The question was how much wine (cases) would 180 gallons be? His answer, "I'm not sure why you are asking, but I like the question! 180 gallons is roughly 682 liters, which is about 909 standard bottles, or 75 cases of wine." WOW. This was no little miracle, throw them a glass or two of wine miracle, what Jesus did was huge and extravagant. They ran out of wine and poof here is another 75 cases of wine for the party that Jesus just happens to have within his power to bring to the table. When researching what wine was to the Jews, it was stated that there are approximately 256 references to wine written in the contents of the Bible. From these references, readers learn that wine was made from grapes, figs, dates and pomegranates. It was often consumed as part of the everyday diet, during times of celebrations, during weddings, as gifts and offerings, and as a symbol of blessing. In some passages it is even used for medicinal purposes. Wine in Jesus day was common but most people did not have a lot of it around the house. Drinking wine was not about pleasure and taste and bouquet, it was about survival and hydration.

In its essence here when the wine was gone, the party was over. Jesus is someone concerned that there be more wine for this celebration to continue.

What does the water symbolize here? In Jesus time the drink of the day was water, grape juice, wine and other fermented drinks. The staple drink was almost always water mixed with wine - even for children. There is a simple reason for this. Water was always brought from the wells in the city or local wells in villages. As a result of this and the hot climate, water was unsafe to drink because of the growth of bacteria in it, and therefore contrary to the above answer water was almost never drunk alone. While the people were unaware of the causes of disease (in bacteria) they were well aware of the problems with the water in a society where life expectancy was no more than 40 years or so anyway. They also knew that wine, being alcoholic, was an antiseptic (although they didn't use that word!) and therefore mixing water with wine enabled the water to be safe to drink, without the recipient becoming drunk.

So, water mixed with wine would have been the common drink of the day. Let's say the average man would be able to carry 4 gallons of water to the jugs. That means that 45 men, or 1 man 45 trips, would have been needed to each carry that much water to the jugs. That is a lot of water. (Slide 3) This is how many grapes it would have taken to get to our 75 cases of wine.

The significance is that the water transforms inside the jug. What can God do inside vessels is evidenced here in the miracle at Cana. When we think deeper about this, we are the vessels and inside of us, without anyone noticing, God can change us, and the miracle will not be seen until the miracle has happened. God can take and change us into 100-point Pino sometimes quickly and sometimes over time? There is nothing about this miracle that is small. There is a massive amount of water gathered, it is placed inside some extremely large clay pots sitting around and transformation takes place inside revealing that the old has turned new with the power of God. (End slide three)

Last week we heard the story of Jesus being transformed from death to life in the resurrection. God did something new and the world would never be the same.

In Jesus's first miracle he takes water and transforms it into wine. It is his first public act of making the impossible possible. And on what

we call Maundy Thursday when Jesus was celebrating the Passover with his disciples he takes the bread and the wine and in his last public act of ministry he blesses the bread and wine and things are forever changed. From his first public act to his last God used the common and ordinary act of serving wine and bearing witness to the transformation that takes place within this act. In the first act there are earthen vessels in the last act clearly, WE are the vessels which hold the wine and are transformed in this miracle. Miracles shatter conventional explanations and expectations.

The steward is confused by the quality and quantity of the wine before them, but the disciples recognize God among them and that Jesus is bringing them God. Where the steward sees the transformation as the wine, the disciples see that God brings transformation through Jesus.

When Jesus is around, we see the in breaking of God and that transformation happens all over the place. And the transformation is extravagant and miraculous. In this story we are pointed to Jesus's death, resurrection and ascension and last week we were assured that Jesus who everyone saw die and was buried, rose again and conquered the grave. The thing that makes Christianity different from every other religion is that it is the only one where death can be overcome by resurrection.

Miracles challenge assumptions about order and control and about what is possible and where God is found.

In a few weeks we will have the opportunity to change people's lives by giving more people around the globe access to clean water. This gift that we have access to every single day, we take so for grant it and waste a mass amount of. It is the life blood of humanity and our brothers and sisters around the globe do not have this precious commodity which is life giving. Our dollars can go to help those who are challenged each day to try and get what they need to survive. We were first introduced to this concept through a preschool parents' party with a group called Thirst. Since that time many years ago, there have been so many organizations getting on board trying to change the lives of those who will get sick and die without access to clean water. By walking or supporting the Walk for Water, we will

change lives, just as Jesus did in this first miracle. Transformation comes in the way we use our dollars to help those in need.

Dr. William Willimon, a mentor and teacher of mine, tells of a Duke University student who asked him to be allowed to introduce speaker Tony Campolo when he was slated to speak at the chapel. The student wanted to share something of what Dr. Campolo meant to him. When Willimon asked him about it, the student told this story:

"I got converted my senior year of high school. I was a fresh, eager Christian, so when Dr. Campolo came to our town to speak, I went to hear him. He was great. After he spoke, he asked us to sign up for his program of inner-city ministry in Philadelphia. So I did.

"Well, in mid-June, I met about a hundred other kids in a Baptist church in Philadelphia. We had about an hour of singing before Dr. Campolo arrived. When he got to the church, we were really worked up, all enthusiastic and ready to go. Dr. Campolo then preached for about an hour and, when he finished, people were shouting and standing on the pews clapping. It was great.

"OK, gang, are you ready to go out there and tell 'em about Jesus?' he asked. 'Yeah, let's go,' we shouted back.

"Get on the bus!" Tony shouted. So we spilled out of the church and on to the bus. We were singing, clapping. But then we began to drive deeper into the depths of the city. We weren't in a great neighborhood when we started riding, but it got worse. Gradually, we stopped singing and everybody, all of us college kids, were just staring out the windows. We were scared.

"Then the bus pulled up before one of the worst-looking projects in Philadelphia. Tony jumped up, opened the bus door, and said, 'All right gang, get out there and tell 'em about Jesus. I'll be back at five o'clock.'

"We made our hesitant way off the bus. We stood there on the corner and had a prayer, then we spread out. I walked down the sidewalk and stopped before a huge tenement house. I gulped, said a prayer, and ventured inside. There was a terrible odor. Windows were out. No lights in the hall. I walked up one flight of stairs toward the door where I heard a baby crying. I knocked on the door.

"Who is it?" said a loud voice inside. Then the door was cracked open and a woman, holding a naked baby, peered out at me. 'What do you want?' she asked in a harsh, mean voice.

"I told her I wanted to tell her about Jesus. With that, she swung the door open and began cursing me. She cursed me all the way down the hall, down the flight of steps, out to the sidewalk. I ran away in defeat.

"I felt terrible. 'Look at me,' I said to myself. 'Some Christian I am. How in the world could somebody like me think that I could tell about Jesus?'

"I sat down on the curb and cried. Then I looked up and noticed a store on the corner, windows all boarded up, bars over the door. I went to that store, walked in, looked around. Then I remembered. The baby had no diapers. The mother was smoking. I bought a box of paper diapers and a pack of cigarettes.

"I walked back to the tenement house, said a prayer, walked in, walked up the flight of stairs, gulped, stood before the door, and knocked. The same voice inside demanded, 'Who is it?' When she opened the door a crack, I slid that box of diapers and those cigarettes in. She looked at them, looked at me, and said, 'Come in.'

"I stepped into the dingy apartment. 'Sit down,' she commanded.

"I sat down on the old sofa and began to play with the baby. I put a diaper on the baby, even though I had never put one on before. When the woman offered me a cigarette, even though I don't smoke, I smoked. I stayed there all afternoon, talking, playing with the baby, listening to the woman.

"About four O'clock, the woman looked at me and said, 'Let me ask you something. What's a nice college boy like you doing in a place like this?'

"So I told her everything I knew about Jesus. It took me about five minutes. Then she said, 'Pray for me and my baby, that we can make it out of this project alive.'

"And I prayed. That evening, after we were all back on the bus, Tony asked, "Well, gang, did any of you get to tell 'em about Jesus?' And I said, 'I not only got to tell 'em about Jesus, I met Jesus... I went out to save somebody, and I ended up getting saved. I became a disciple.'"

Clearly transformation had taken place in this student's heart during that day. One more example of how transformation can change us happened in Brooklyn, New York, at Chush, which is a school that caters to learning disabled children. Some children remain in Chush for their entire school career, while others can be main-streamed into conventional schools. At a Chush fund-raising dinner, the father of a

Chush child delivered a speech that would never be forgotten by all who attended. After extolling the school and its dedicated staff, he cried out, "Where is the perfection in my son Shaya? Everything God does is done with perfection. But my child cannot understand things as other children do. My child cannot remember facts and figures as other children do. Where is God's perfection?" The audience was shocked by the question, pained by the father's anguish and stilled by the piercing query. "I believe," the father answered, "that when God brings a child like this into the world, the perfection that he seeks is in the way people react to this child." He then told the following story about his son Shaya: One afternoon Shaya and his father walked past a park where some boys Shaya knew were playing baseball.

Shaya asked, "Do you think they will let me play?" Shaya's father knew that his son was not at all athletic and that most boys would not want him on their team. But Shaya's father understood that if his son was chosen to play it would give him a comfortable sense of belonging. Shaya's father approached one of the boys in the field and asked if Shaya could play. The boy looked around for guidance from his team-mates. Getting none, he took matters into his own hands and said "We are losing by six runs and the game is in the eighth inning.

I guess he can be on our team and we'll try to put him up to bat in the ninth inning." Shaya's father was ecstatic as Shaya smiled broadly. Shaya was told to put on a glove and go out to play short center field. In the bottom of the eighth inning, Shaya's team scored a few runs but was still behind by three. In the bottom of the ninth inning, Shaya's team scored again and now with two outs and the bases loaded with the potential winning run on base, Shaya was scheduled to be up. Would the team actually let Shaya bat at this juncture and give away their chance to win the game? Surprisingly, Shaya was given the bat.

Everyone knew that it was all but impossible because Shaya didn't even know how to hold the bat properly, let alone hit with it. However, as Shaya stepped up to the plate, the pitcher moved a few steps to lob the ball in softly so Shaya should at least be able to make contact. The first pitch came in and Shaya swung clumsily and missed. One of Shaya's team-mates came up to Shaya and together they held the bat and faced the pitcher waiting for the next pitch. The pitcher again took a few steps forward to toss the ball softly toward Shaya. As the pitch came in, Shaya and his team-mate swung at the bat and together they hit a slow ground ball to the pitcher. The pitcher picked up the soft grounder and could easily have thrown the ball to the first baseman.

Shaya would have been out and that would have ended the game. Instead, the pitcher took the ball and threw it on a high arc to

right field, far beyond reach of the first baseman. Everyone started yelling, "Shaya, run to first. Run to first." Never in his life had Shaya run to first. He scampered down the baseline wide-eyed and startled. By the time he reached first base, the right fielder had the ball. He could have thrown the ball to the second baseman who would tag out Shaya, who was still running. But the right fielder understood what the pitcher's intentions were, so he threw the ball high and far over the third baseman's head. Everyone yelled, "Run to second, run to second." Shaya ran towards second base as the runners ahead of him deliriously circled the bases towards home.

As Shaya reached second base, the opposing short stop ran to him, turned him in the direction of third base and shouted, "Run to third." As Shaya rounded third, the boys from both teams ran behind him screaming, "Shaya run home." Shaya ran home, stepped on home plate and all 18 boys lifted him on their shoulders and made him the hero, as he had just hit a "grand slam" and won the game for his team. "That day," said the father softly with tears now rolling down his face, "those 18 boys reached their level of God's perfection. Clearly transformation had taken place.

Jesus gift at this wedding is wine, but we know that Jesus gift is new life within old vessels.

Many of us tend to look at situations and think that the wine has run out and the party is over. Jesus looks at situations and knows that what is seen can be transformed into something more wonderful than was there before or ever dreamed of. We all have situations in front of us that are in need of transformation. Relationships, work opportunities, marriages, organizations, attitudes, health. What if we could with the assurance of God who can make all things new, placed those situations into God's hands and waited for our own water to be turned into wine. Where the in breaking of God would wow us as the transformation took place in our own earthen vessels?

Transformation can and is possible, if we tie our knot and cling to Jesus and his timing on when and how the transformation will take place. Our job is to bear witness to the miracles which can take place which have nothing to do with but we can proclaim the amazing God who is changing water into wine in situations which look like the party's over. Where is it that our water needs to be placed in God's hands for transformation?

Amen.