

Peter and I are anticipating a wedding! Let me tell you it has been a little stressful already and I really am not that involved with the details as the mother of the groom. When people learn we are anticipating a wedding, we hear plenty of stories both the mishaps and joyful ones! Right now we are just dealing with the guest list! I pray each day that Jesus will be in the midst of everything! Right now, the concentration is on the celebration! I hope we don't run out of wine but, since it will be in California, I can't imagine that would happen!

The gospel lesson tells us that at the end of a wedding celebration Jesus turned 180 gallons of water into 180 gallons of wine. It was, John tells us, the third day. These people had been partying for three days and Jesus supplies them with another 180 gallons of wine—and this wasn't Boone's Farm, either; it was the best wine of the party!

Weddings were a really big deal in the ancient world (even more so than in our modern world—and we modern people overdo everything). They were a major event in the life of a village. Often it was the only feast a couple could afford over a lifetime, so they lasted for several days. Life in the 1st century, especially for the poor, was so dreary and dire that it took 3 or 4 days just to get people to psychologically leave the old drudgery behind and enter into the celebration. The sign of water into wine happened near the end of this wedding celebration. People had finally left the old and entered the joy of the new...and they were about to run dry. It would have been a shame to almost get there, and then not make it across the joy threshold. That kind of disappointment would also have shamed the bride and groom. Small villages are like that—they would never have been able to live down that kind of social failure.

Fortunately, Jesus and his mother were invited to their wedding. Jesus' mother shares the news that the couple has run out of wine. Jesus responds, "Is that any of our business, Mother – yours or mine? This isn't my time. Don't push me!" Yet, Jesus' mother tells the servants "Whatever he tells you, do it!" and the servants listen to Jesus, fill the jars with water and serve them. It turns out to be wine, better wine than what was served at the beginning. Whatever the reason, Jesus was not concerned about this at first, perhaps Jesus just wanted to enjoy a wedding! But Jesus' mother was concerned and he acted to meet her concerns.

Whether Jesus did so to obey his mother, or planned to all along—we have no idea. But this was the first of the wonders that Jesus performed that caused others to believe in him. None of the other Gospels focus on miraculous signs the way John's Gospel does. This story shows the fullness of Jesus' humanity and divinity. Jesus was present at this wedding to have a good time, to enjoy this moment, to be fully human- at the same time, Jesus changes water into wine, altering the perception of him as an observer to an active participant of God's rule on earth. It's a complex story, one where Jesus moves to the forefront of proclaiming the coming of God's kingdom. In John's Gospel, it is the performing this of miracle, of deciding that the hour has come, in which Jesus participates in the kingdom of God, fully human and fully divine. Before returning to their lives of hard work and struggle, everyone present is able to cross the threshold into joy. It's a sign pointing to God's intention: life full to the brim!

Turning water into wine reveals the abundant grace in this season of Epiphany. And what does abundant grace taste like? Like the best wine when you are expecting the cheap stuff. It's one thing to say, "Jesus is the source of grace." It's quite another to experience of it. The details of abundance cannot be overlooked. Where have you experienced this kind of grace? Where have you experienced those tangible moments of grace beyond your understanding and imagining? Perhaps we need to look outside our boxes of reality.

Who were the first to experience the abundance of grace in this story? They were strong young servants who carried the stone jars and filled them with water. You know, those folks who would be standing on the edge of any wedding reception today, waiting to serve, to clear, to carry the individually sliced pieces of cake to the tables of the guests, those same ones who had the unenviable task of cleaning up after those who had enjoyed the party perhaps a little too much. Those servants on the edge of the celebration were the only ones to actually witness the miracle here. To be sure, the chief steward tasted it, and apparently his taste buds were still sensitive so he was able to enjoy the fine quality of the wine. And the bridegroom and the bride and all their guests enjoyed the gift of the miracle. Still, it was the servants who saw this wondrous miracle of abundance play out right before their eyes. It was the servants who saw it all - those who most likely never actually even got a sip of the 180 gallons of fine wine that was now being stored in those stone jars. Indeed, they were, they are those who go mostly unseen, un-noticed by the rest of us. And yet, they are the ones who went home with a story of a miracle that night. They are the ones who first glimpsed the promise of Jesus. They are, indeed, as we hear throughout the Gospels - the ones for whom the gifts of God are especially meant. And so whether they ever tasted this wine or not, they must have

gone home with the dawning recognition that in the simple act of 'saving' a party, the world itself was about to change in Christ Jesus. Indeed, in Jesus the world itself was about to change.

This story just cannot be taken at face value. It is a story of hope for those embarrassed hosts at life's party who find themselves under resourced and red-faced at the possibility that the celebration has exceeded their most careful planning and logistics.

It is a story of a wise rabbi who realizes that miracles don't require interference or intervention. All miracles need is willing participation in the unfolding of the mystery. To be open to the possibility that hospitality can supersede holiness and that vessels are better filled with joy giving wine than justifying washing rituals. God is calling us to participate in the miracles that are about to unfold. That is our prayer for this Special Session of General Conference in St. Louis that is happening today and for 3 more days. In the midst of this gathering we pray that God will make wine out of water and that all might be invited to the party to experience the generosity of God's kingdom. We don't know what changes, for better or worse, lie ahead. Of course, that can be said of our ancestors long ago, too, and we're grateful for and inspired by their courage and foresight, and their generosity in thinking of us long before we were born. How will the times change the ways we serve and witness, too? What hidden abundance lies within our sacred traditions, ready to be transformed, in this hour, like the water in the great stone jars?

No doubt God is at work in unexpected places and in surprising ways. Bauckham reminds us that Jesus was about bringing life abundant, "life invigorated and intensified." Jesus does this "by connecting people with the divine springs of life from which the vitality of life is constantly sustained and replenished"

What is the source of your own spiritual vitality? What is the source of our church's vitality? What does "life abundant" look like not just for our congregations, but in the communities where we are sent, where we are called to be a blessing in God's world?

Joy is found when we follow the signs that point to the presence and power of the Holy One in little, out of the way places (like Cana) where and when we least expect it. Jesus said, "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10b). So as we leave worship today, may we be open to experience the abundance of miracles in our midst. May we experience blessings upon blessings, as God's kingdom breaks all around us!

## **In Cana at a Wedding Feast**

In Cana at a wedding feast, Christ worked his first great sign.  
There Jesus' mother told her son, "They don't have any wine!"  
He called for six stone water jars; they filled them to the brim;  
Through water changed to wine that day, his friends believed in him.

O Lord, we see your wondrous signs and know through faith-filled eyes:  
You are new wine that brings us joy, true bread that satisfies.  
You give clear vision to your church, you make the wounded whole.  
You give us hope, when seas are rough; for you are in control!

## John 2:1-11



🕯 Adults get the mental picture of how much water was changed into wine when they hear the text read. To help children get that picture and to celebrate the abundance here,

Display a gallon milk jug. Talk about how many glasses of milk or juice you could pour out of it. Then read verse 6 and imagine how many glasses could be poured from 20-30 gallon jugs. Then do the math. If each stone jug held 20 gallons how many gallons would the six jugs hold. Marvel at how much wine this was!

Or, gather 20 one gallon milk jugs to give an even clearer picture of how much water was in each stone jug. For impact, start with a single milk jug up front and have a group of children bring 19 more in to pile around you.

Or, I guess you could go over the top and gather 120 or even 180 milk jugs – if you could find that many! Leave them piled in the front of the sanctuary around the Table – especially if God’s abundance is the central worship theme of the day. (If anyone does this, please take a picture and share it with the rest of us!!!!)

🕯 Jesus turned ordinary water into fine wine. Jesus can also turn everything that seems ordinary in our lives into something amazing – like water into wine, coal into diamonds, sand into glass, or **bits of fabric into a quilt**. (This idea came from Lutheran seminary professors.) With children I’d present fabric scraps and a quilt. This may be an opportunity to feature a quilter in your congregation.