

**“The Water Recognized its Creator and Blushed”**  
**John 2:1-12**

I always loved going to see my Aunt Mary. Aunt Mary was my father’s sister who still lived with her husband in the little house on Shubert Avenue where my father grew up in Maysville, Kentucky. We didn’t visit my father’s family much. As so often happens in families, daughters tend to see their parents more and that is what occurred with us, visiting my mother’s parents and siblings much more frequently. Plus, my mother’s and my father’s families were different in other respects. My mother’s father was a minister, as were two of my uncles. There were no ministers in my father’s family.

Having grown up in abject poverty with a shell shocked World War I veteran for a father, all the Weavers, men and women, very early in life learned how to survive in any way they could. Except for Aunt Mary, who remained the stabilizing influence for any of the family still residing in Maysville. She had married my Uncle Millard at the age of fourteen, rather shocking to us now, but not unheard of in that day and time, and likely an avenue out of a crowded house devoid of resources and opportunities.

Of course, growing up I knew none of this. I could tell Aunt Mary loved me and I reciprocated that feeling and thoroughly enjoyed being at her house where there was a constant flow of family and friends.

And one of the main reasons everyone was there was the food. When we went to Maysville as a family, my mom would insist we call Aunt Mary and tell her we were coming. But when it was dad and myself, my dad would say, “We’ll stop at Mary’s for lunch.” Maysville was about two hours from Ashland, so sometimes we arrived for brunch, and sometimes for lunch, depending on whether we paused outside of town to see my Aunt Lucille, owner and operator of the Knotty Pine Bar. But it didn’t matter when we appeared, or whether or not we called ahead, a feast was waiting.

Now, some of you will remember how people used to cook. My aunt never fixed a meat, two vegetables, and a dessert. There were at least two meat dishes, usually ham, and always fried chicken. At least four, if not five vegetables, and if she had a hint I was coming, my favorite, corn pudding. Homemade rolls and biscuits were present, and sausage gravy just in case you might need a little something extra. There would be cake, blackberry for my father, so they could talk about when they were children picking blackberries to make money.

At least two kinds of pie graced the table, usually apple and cherry. And the only store bought dish allowed, miniature transparent pies from Magee’s Bakery. Loaded with enough calories and sugar to last a month, Maysville is the only place in the world you can buy them, and to this day I can still taste them.

The food filled the room, crowding every table and counter space. Anytime of the day you visited people were eating, family, friends, friends of the family, church members, people I didn’t have a clue who they were.

My Aunt Mary was a big woman, almost six feet tall and built like the former Chicago Bears linebacker, Dick Butkus. But she possessed a heart and faith just as large, and just as active. Her table was not an attempt to show how good she could cook — everyone already knew that. It was a sign, a symbol, of who she was, her faith, a concrete method of expressing a bountiful welcome, and extravagant hospitality, saying no matter who you are we will feed you. We will always open our arms and welcome you.

“Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk, But you have kept the good wine until now.”

In the Gospel According to John, Jesus’ first miracle is the turning of water into wine. But John’s focus is not the miracle itself, but the abundance, the extravagance of its result. John’s point is not what Jesus did, but the way in which he did it.

Now, before we venture into the purpose of the miracle, allow me to talk a moment about interpreting these verses. One of the disservices I think the clergy does lay people is acting like all biblical, theological, and interpretive issues are cut and dried, easy to see, effortless to interpret. But from the very beginning of its composition, scriptural interpretation has been difficult and controversial.

The Gospel According to John is full of signs and symbols inviting speculation and allegorical possibilities. For instance, through the centuries there have emerged numerous suggestions as to why Jesus, his mother, and his disciples were at the wedding. There is a legend that the disciple John, the son of Zebedee, was the bridegroom. Others assume that Mary’s presence means it was a family wedding. An apocryphal tradition states that Mary was the aunt of the bridegroom. Still others postulate that Jesus and his disciples showed up unexpectedly, that they were the first recorded wedding crashers, and that is why the wine gave out. But, there is no evidence for any of this.

Then, there is the interchange between Jesus and his mother. “...Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’”

It is hard not to view this as a harsh exchange between Jesus and his mother. Why would Jesus address her as woman, instead of Mother? Yet, he employs the same address when he hangs from the cross and gives her care over to John. And what about Jesus’ reply to her: “...what concern is that to you and me?” Remember, New Testament Greek possesses no punctuation. We don’t know for sure if this is a statement or a question. The words can be read as harsh and challenging or in the original Greek they can also indicate understanding such as, “Don’t worry, I’ll take care of this.” Or, they can mean, “Mom, this isn’t my problem.” But can they be that harsh when she goes ahead and tells the servants to do whatever he says? We just don’t know.

Also, for John, is the wine symbolic of Jesus replacing the law of the Old Testament? Do the six jars represent theological incompleteness since they are

short of the sacred number seven? Does the steward not knowing the origin of the wine illustrate the blindness of the world to Jesus? Is the note that they arrived at the wedding on the third day an allusion to the resurrection? We just don't know.

The concepts, historical, local, and religious allusions that would have been obvious and immediately accessible to John's first readers are no longer readily available to us. And that makes biblical interpretation difficult and humbling.

Jack died. His lawyer is standing before the family and reads Jack's last will and testament.

"To my dear wife, I leave the house, fifty acres of land, and \$1 million.

"To my son, Barry, I leave my big Lexus and the Jaguar.

"To my daughter, Suzy, I leave my yacht and \$250,000.

"And to my brother-in-law, Jeff, who always insisted that health is better than wealth, I leave my treadmill."

When we insist that we know exactly the best way to interpret the scriptures, we may miss out on its riches.

Before I discuss the main thrust of the passage, I want to note a secondary, but important, element of the story. Jesus is at a wedding. People are having a good time. We have no reason to believe Jesus isn't having a good time.

A marriage feast lasted for seven days. It was a ray of sunshine in a Palestinian life of hard labor and difficult survival. It was a premier event in the life of a family, and in the experience of a town. There is a Jewish saying that states, "Without wine, there is no joy." A common Old Testament symbol for joy in the last days is the abundance of wine. Hospitality was a sacred duty in the Middle East. For a Jewish family, a son's wedding was the social event of their lifetime. It would be discussed and relived for the rest of their days. The worst thing that could happen was to run out of wine, no longer be able to be hospitable.

And that is exactly what occurs, and what makes Jesus' response so interesting and noteworthy. Jesus employs his power to save someone from embarrassment. Not hunger or devastating sin, but embarrassment. What Jesus did was not very important in the scheme of things. Yet, for the bridegroom and his family it was a most important moment.

This is a reminder that our lives, living like Jesus, take many forms. Yes, we should, we must, live righteously, give generously, speak out against racism, prejudice, greed, and violence. But, we also must say a kind word to our neighbor, hold the door open for our elders, welcome newcomers graciously, and when possible, save someone from embarrassment. Our lives, like that of Jesus, are to be conducted in a constant, and expanded, spirit of love, service, and just plain, old helpfulness.

An out-of-towner accidentally drove his car into a deep ditch on the side of a country road. Luckily, a farmer happened by with his big, old horse named Benny. The man asked for help, and the farmer said Benny could pull his car out. So the farmer backed Benny up and hitched him to the man's car bumper.

Then he yelled, “Pull, Nellie, pull!” Benny didn’t move.

Then he yelled, “Come on, pull, Ranger!” Still, Benny didn’t move.

Then the farmer yelled really loudly, “Now, pull, Fred...pull hard!” Benny just stood there.

Then the farmer nonchalantly said, “Okay, Benny...now pull.” Benny pulled the car out of the ditch.

The motorist was very grateful but curious. “I really appreciate that,” he said, “but why did you call your horse by the wrong name three times?”

The farmer replied, “Why, old Benny’s blind. If he thought he was the only one pulling, he wouldn’t even try.”

Christ calls us to be helpful, to be like Jesus, even when we think we are the only one pulling.

Now, what did the gospel writer John want his readers to take away from this story? In this gospel, miracles are signs. A miracle’s purpose is to reveal the glory of Jesus. The miracle affirms that Jesus is the Son of God and thereby calls us to belief in him. Verse eleven expresses John’s intent in relating this incident: “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”

The center of this story is Jesus, his glory and his gift. In John, miracles are not to astound us, but to point to who Jesus is. And the particulars of the miracle add to both Christ’s glory and an understanding of his nature.

For instance, how water is changed into wine is never described. Yet, we are given detailed information concerning how big the stone jars are, that they were filled to the brim, and how exquisite the wine is. Why?

Because as Gail R. O’Day writes in The New Interpreter’s Bible, this “is a miracle of abundance, of extravagance, of transformation and new possibilities.” The glory, the power, the love and forgiveness brought by Jesus Christ change our lives, flood the desert of our sin and guilt, offer an extravagance of God’s love and acceptance. Jesus doesn’t just confer the ability to be nice, be civil to our neighbor, or give an extra dollar a week in the collection plate, Jesus delivers the opportunity to radically transform who we are, how we think and how we act. God’s love, God’s grace, God’s mercy, comes in an abundance, an extravagance. There is more than we could ever need or imagine.

Anyone reading this story knew they didn’t require another 180 gallons of wine at this small town wedding. The idea is that there is more there than you could ever need. And that is exactly how God responds to our need for his love and grace. The miracle relates how much God wants to love us, save us, and transform us.

A store owner was tacking a sign above his door that read “Puppies for Sale.” Such signs have a way of attracting small children, and sure enough, a little boy appeared under the store owner’s sign. “How much are you going to sell the puppies for?” he asked.

The store owner replied, "Anywhere from \$30 - \$50."

The little boy reached in his pocket and pulled out some change. "I have \$2.37," he said, "Can I please look at them?"

The store owner smiled and whistled. Out of the kennel came Lady, who ran down the aisle, followed by five teeny, tiny balls of fur. But one puppy was lagging considerably behind. Immediately, the little boy singled out the lagging, limping puppy, and asked, "What's wrong with that little dog?"

The store owner explained that the veterinarian had examined the puppy and discovered it didn't have a hip socket. It would always limp. It would always be lame.

The boy became excited. "That's the puppy I want to buy."

The store owner said, "No, son, you don't want to buy that little dog. If you really want him, I'll just give him to you."

The boy got quite upset. He looked straight into the man's eyes, pointing his finger, and said, "I don't want you to give him to me. That little dog is worth every bit as much as all the other dogs, and I'll pay full price. In fact, I'll give you \$2.37 now, and 50 cents a month until I have him paid for."

The store owner countered, "You really don't want to buy this little dog. He is never going to be able to run and jump and play with you like the other puppies."

To the man's surprise, the boy reached down and rolled up his pant leg to reveal a badly twisted, crippled left leg supported by a big, metal brace. The boy looked up at the store owner and softly replied, "Well, I don't run so well myself, and that puppy will need someone who understands!"

When we look at our lives, we don't always run so well ourselves. We're broken. God knows it. And yet the extravagant love of God points at each one of us and says, "That's the one I want."

"The Water Recognized its Creator and Blushed"

I wish I could say I thought of this title, but it is a medieval quotation. Yet, it states the purpose of John's telling of the story. There is nothing Jesus cannot do, with wine, or with you and me. An abundance, an extravagance, of God's love and forgiveness awaits those who choose to believe. The steward immediately knew when he had tasted the good wine. "...you have kept the good wine until now."

Well, the wine of love and forgiveness is still here, in abundance. Are you ready to drink it?

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