

The Best Stuff – John 2:1-11

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Today's setting for the gospel text is this wedding. Back in the day, weddings were a big deal, like a REALLY big deal. First of all, they weren't simply afternoon or evening affairs. The celebrations tended to last for several days—a week even. Seven days of eating, drinking, taking time off from work, and spending time with loved ones.

At this particular wedding in Cana, Jesus is there with the disciples; and his mother happens to be at the wedding, too. This is truly a unique gospel story. We don't find Mary and her adult son interacting in such a light-hearted setting elsewhere in the gospels. But here they are supposedly having a good time, until an emergency erupts.

There is no more wine. That's a big deal.

“Wine held deep practical and spiritual significance for Jewish partygoers. Practically, it did what wine does for us today. It filled the stomach, gladdened the heart and helped the mind drift from matters that might hinder one's effort at a weeklong Sabbath and celebration. Spiritually, it served as a sign and symbol of the joy and blessing that flow from God's right hand into the hearts and lives of his chosen family (Psalm 104:15; Proverbs 3:10). Without wine -- which was the centerpiece of the feast -- the celebration would no doubt come to a grinding halt, with its absence leaving a bitter taste in the mouths of the guests and shame in the heart of the host.

“So, in steps Jesus. At the behest of his mother, Jesus makes sure the celebration does not cease. Filling six large, stone water

jars, Jesus performs his very first miracle, transforming some 150 gallons of water into an overflow of top-shelf, aged-to-perfection party wine. For sure, this was not the kind of wine that comes out of a box and can be bought in bulk at Costco. This was, according to the unsuspecting father of the bride, "the good stuff." Crisis averted. Party on." (*Homilectics Online*, Jan. 20, 2013)

Jesus here meets a basic need. He made sure enough wine was at the party. And if it had been a kind of wine that wasn't the best, nobody much would've cared. As the host said, "Usually, the good wine is served first, and lesser wine is served last when nobody could much tell the difference." As long as they had wine of some form to drink, everybody would've gotten along fine.

Jesus converts the water, however, not just into wine, but the best wine. He really goes all out, which is odd considering his demeanor when all this began. Consider the fact that, at the beginning of the text, he didn't express much interest in doing anything in this situation.

"Woman, what concern is that to you and me?" he asks Mary after she identifies this crisis. He didn't seem to want to get involved in this whole thing.

In fact, in this Gospel of John, Jesus has a habit of first refusing and then fulfilling requests. At the start of chapter 7 Jesus tells his brothers that he will not go to Jerusalem, but then he goes "in secret." At the start of chapter 11 Mary and Martha implicitly ask Jesus to come and heal their brother Lazarus (or at least come to be with them during this difficult time), but he doesn't—until he does two days later.

Jesus seems reluctant at first to be Jesus, until he's not.

Here at the wedding, Jesus goes from wanting to just stay in the background and watch the proceedings to engineering his first public miracle, to not only meeting a need through this miracle, but ensuring the best possible outcome: enough wine and the best wine.

This has probably happened to you at some point in your life: somebody gives you a gift—like tickets to a ballgame or a concert. And you're so appreciative of that simple gift. You look forward to the good time that has been gifted to you, not having any idea where you'll be sitting.

And then you show up to the event and find out that the seats are in the front row or on the 50-yard line or at center court. And you're overwhelmed that the ones who gifted you the tickets also gifted you with the best tickets.

Jesus does the same thing here. His miracle of turning the water into wine was quite enough: it preserved the party and was a jaw-dropping act. But he didn't need to make it the best wine; nobody would've expected that.

Instead, we once again have a window into his character: providing not just to get us by, but going beyond that to provide the best.

Do you know somebody who goes out of their way to give you the absolute best? At this church, for the last eleven and a half years, Dawn Zilles gave us her best. She served tirelessly, graciously, and sacrificially as our office administrator. Dawn is so smart and efficient in her work. And she combined that here at the church with a loving and caring persona that gained us her trust and friendship.

She gave us her absolute best—like the finest wine. And we dined on that for more than a decade. And like the wine at this

wedding, it never ran out. And we celebrate with her on her retirement.

Dawn, would you please stand so that we can salute you and thank you?

When we are in the presence of somebody who gives us their best, our lives are made better. And most of the time, it's given in ways that are understated and sometimes without even the knowledge of this person's authorship. That's how Dawn operated.

You know, what Jesus does in this wedding banquet drama is surprisingly underplayed. There is no account of Jesus placing his hands over the jars of water and praying for a transformation into wine. The change is mysterious and done almost in passing.

At the wedding, in some mysterious way it seems that properly seeing the sign also requires faith to see it. The servants know where the wine has come from, yet they apparently do not see the glory of Jesus in this event; In fact, the servants really have no idea how it happened. They are not explicitly said to believe. The glory remains hidden from most at the wedding.

And yet, the disciples, who knew him, went away believing that Jesus was behind this miracle.

The result is not that the wedding is filled with marveling crowds but that the disciples believed in Jesus (verse 11). The event has become, for them, the first "sign," a revelation of Jesus' glory. This glory is not simply equated with the power to do miracles. Rather, as a sign this event points beyond itself to the deeper reality of just who Jesus is.

Jesus gives us his best, too. And most of the time, he's not flashy about it. He does things that are good, once in a while

miraculous, with the intention that we would be blessed and that we would come to believe in him a little more deeply.

Christ gives us his best, born out of a love that's irrepressible and relentless. And most of the time it's shown in the people who come into our lives and remind us of what's right: their devotion, their humility, their dependability. They're not necessarily flashy, but they do great things.

Those of you who are wine connoisseurs know a good wine by how it tastes. You know when you've had the best stuff. Thanks be to God for the ways Jesus continues to give us his best. We know it when we see it.