

**Sunday Sermon**  
**January 20, 2019**  
**John 2:1-11**  
**“Filled to the Brim”**

Introduction

It is the third Sunday of the New Year. The first Sunday we celebrated Epiphany, with its themes of light and stars and gifts. At the close of the service each worshipper received an Epiphany star with a single word on it. His or her word for the year, to reflect upon and let the Spirit speak to them through it.

Last week we celebrated Baptism of the Lord Sunday with its themes of water and the Spirit’s anointing. Worshippers were given a sea shell to take to the baptismal font and place in the water, saying “I remember my baptism and give thanks.”

As worshippers left the service last week, some said, “We received stars with words first and then sea shells. What is next week?” “Well,” I answered, “next week the gospel lesson is about Jesus turning water into wine.”

I hope you did not come today expecting to receive mini bottles.

I never learned to drink wine, or any alcoholic beverage for that matter. I tried in my younger days. But it made my nose burn and my eyes water. And it had an odor and a taste I could not get used to. And I did not like the way it tasted when I burped.

So finally I gave up on my efforts. I did the same with coffee. I wish I could say I did the same with chocolate.

So this first miraculous sign of our Lord of changing water into wine, never held much significance for me. I could not understand why they would not just as soon have drunk the water.

I

But this is the Gospel of John, and John has a wonderful format to it. There is a simple story that is told, and then behind that story, there is almost always a bigger story with a deeper meaning.

On the surface, this is a story about a wedding at Cana of Galilee attended by Jesus and his disciples and his mother, Mary, a typical family wedding with typical family problems. Family issues always come out at weddings. Oh, I could tell you some stories.

But at this wedding, the problem was just that the wedding planner had not purchased enough wine. Because of the way the

story is told, some believe it was actually Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was in charge of this wedding. After all, she was the one addressing the problem, recruiting the help of her son and giving orders to the servants.

Not unlike today, a wedding in a village in Palestine was the event of the year. People looked forward for months to a marriage celebration. The partying went on for days. Everyone brought gifts, and in return, the host was expected to keep the guests well supplied with food, drink, music and merrymaking.

It was, therefore, more than a minor crisis at this wedding when the wine ran out. The Jewish rabbis had a saying, "Without wine there is no joy."

The Jews connected wine with the hospitality code of welcoming. So running out of wine meant an unwelcoming or uncaring gesture on the part of the host.

## II

Now standing by the entrance to the hall, by the guest book and the table for gifts, were six large stone jars. They had been placed there, John says, for the important rite of purification, a ceremony required before entering any service of worship, including a wedding.

Each jar, John tells us, could hold 20 to 30 gallons. If all were full, that would be a huge amount of water. That is strange, because according to Jewish law, only about a cup of water was necessary to purify a hundred men.

What they did was dip their fingers in the water and then pat their ears, their eyes, their nostrils, and their mouth. It did not take much water. Yet in these jars there would be well over a hundred gallons of water, enough water to purify the entire world.

Do you see the deeper meaning? Jesus brings the purifying water in a quantity large enough for the whole world.

Responding to his mother's request for help, Jesus has the servants fill all the jars to the brim with water. Can't you imagine the raised eyebrows when Jesus told them to do this and the mumbling, "We need wine, Jesus, not water"?

Nevertheless, the servants filled the jars, and then Jesus instructed them to draw out some of the liquid, and take it to the chief steward. When the steward tasted the water, which had become wine, he said, "You have saved the best for last!"

Here is another deeper meaning: Prophets and holy leaders had come sent by God to the people. But Jesus, the best, has come at last.

It was a huge amount of wine Jesus made, 120 to 180 gallons. Much, much less would have sufficed; the wedding party was almost over.

The deeper meaning here? Jesus provides an enormous amount to show an enormous inexhaustible supply of grace and joy that he brings. Later Jesus would say, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it in abundance."

### III

In C.S. Lewis' book of essays, *God in the Dock*, Lewis asks, "Why are we always so amazed about the miracles of Jesus?"

Turning water to wine was not something surprising for Jesus to do. Jesus was God. And God has been turning water into wine since the beginning of time "

Lewis says, "Each miracle writes for us in small letters something that God has already written, or will write, in letters almost too large to be noticed, across the whole canvas of nature."

We know about the transforming process of grapes, sugar, water and yeast into wine. It happens all the time. What is truly miraculous is God's transforming work in our lives.

There was an older man in my church in east Tennessee, a committed, faithful follower, loving husband, father, grandfather. One day he told me about his early years, years wasted in drinking, neglecting his family, making them live on next to nothing.

"You know, preacher," he said, "I don't know a whole lot about the miracles in the Bible. I don't know about this story, about what kind of wine it was Jesus made and if it was really just grape juice, like the Baptists say. But I know this: that God can take a man and turn the corn liquor in him into milk and bread to feed his children. God did it in me, and that is the greatest miracle of all.

The true miracle in this text is not in the wine, but in that very last verse: Jesus did this and revealed his glory and the disciples believed in him. That is our miracle too, is it not? We catch a glimpse of his glory, and we believe.

Conclusion

There is an overwhelming abundance in our Lord's faithfulness, a grace filled to the brim and overflowing. And no matter how much you dip out of it, you cannot use it up. It never runs out. Abundant, miraculous, transforming grace. May you receive it as your gift today.