

## **John 2:1-11**

**2**On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup>Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup>When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." <sup>4</sup>And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." <sup>5</sup>His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." <sup>6</sup>Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup>He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. <sup>9</sup>When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup>and said to him, "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." <sup>11</sup>Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Weddings are accidents waiting to happen. All weddings have their fair share of mishaps and *faux pas*. Some of them can be doozies.

I have had the honor of officiating over all sorts of weddings. I've married young couples in the throws of being madly in love. I've married middle aged folks who find love after failed marriages. I've even married septuagenarians who found love together after saying tearful goodbyes to their first spouses.

I'll never forget one of my first weddings. I was a young pastor, just 25 years old. A 46 year old lady came to me and asked me to do her wedding. Her fiancée was younger than me. He was a mere 23 years old, just a few years older than the woman's grown children, who were then in college.

Unconventional, to be sure. Nevertheless, who am I to question love? So, I agreed to conduct the wedding. It was a small wedding, mostly friends and family. Since the church was small and the accommodations meager, the plan was for the bride to dress and ready herself at a nearby location and arrive just minutes before the service.

The groom was there and the church was packed. The organist began to play. And at the appropriate time, the groom and I took our places at the front of the church.

Then we waited. The organist continued playing, and we waited. Ten minutes passed. NO BRIDE. Fifteen minutes passed and no bride.

Keep in mind that this was before the age of cell phones and instant communication. There was but one phone in the church and it was in the office. So we stood there and waited. The organist worked through all her music three times, so she just stopped playing.

About 30 minutes into the debacle, I began to wonder if the bride was going to be a no-show. I was wondering at what point one just says, "Sorry, but I think you got stood up at the altar." Just then the groom's father stands up, slaps his forehead and declares to everyone that HE was supposed to pick her up. He rushed out of the church jumped in his car and sped away. We waited.

Ten minutes later he arrives with the bride. The bride was scheduled to make her entrance at 6 sharp. She didn't walk down that aisle until 6:45.

In our passage today, we hear the story of a wedding that is on the verge of being ruined. A wedding in a small town like Cana would have been a community affair. There would have been feasting and parties and celebrations for seven days. And, the most important component of all the merriment would have been wine.

In a world without modern sanitation and refrigeration, wine was a staple. Access to clean water was somewhat limited, but wine, purified by its moderate alcohol content was almost always safe to drink.

In some ways, to run out of wine at a wedding would have been more than just a breach of etiquette, it would have been inhospitable. In such a harsh environ, hospitality was of great importance, and a breech in hospitality was more than just embarrassing, it was humiliating.

Jesus' mother then asks him to fix the situation. We have no real idea of knowing just what she had in mind. Was she seeking a miracle, or just asking her boy to run back to Nazareth and bring back a few more bottles of wine.

His answer to his mother's request is shocking to our ears. "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?"

Scholars with a much greater grasp of that time and day assure us that, while certainly unusual, such a response was not rude, but rather business like, a kind of formula expression of disagreement.

Then Jesus adds cryptically, "My hour has not yet come."

However it sounded to Mary, she totally ignores it. She doesn't argue with him or seem offended by his answer, she just tells the servants to do whatever he tells them.

The interaction between Mary and Jesus is really kinda funny. It reminds me of conversations I'd have with my mother.

"Mat, go clean your room."

"I can't right now. I'm busy."

"I put the vacuum cleaner out for you."

"I'll do it tomorrow mom."

Ten minutes later: I'm vacuuming my room.

This reminds me of Jesus' Parable of the Two Sons. Jesus said that a father had two sons and asks them to go to the vineyard and work. The first refused, but then later changes his mind and goes and works in the vineyard. The father then goes to the second son, and asks him to go and work in the vineyard. This son says yes, but never bothers to go and do the work. Jesus then asks, "Who did the will of the father?" The first, of course.

Jesus says no to his mother. She ignores this answer and assumes he will come to the rescue. And, sure enough, for some inexplicable reason, he changes his mind, and does as his mother asks.

He tells the servants to go and fill the jars used for purification all the way to the top. Six stone jars, each holding about 30 gallons. That's about 180 gallons. Fill them to the top, he demands.

Interestingly, he never really does anything. He presumably doesn't even bother to go near the jars; doesn't even bother to say a prayer or some incantation over the jars. He just tells them to draw some of the water out and bring it to the chief steward.

The chief steward tastes the wine and is amazed, not by the way, because he thinks a miracle has occurred. He is amazed because the wine is so rich and robust and good. He declares: "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."

Jesus doesn't even bother to take credit. But the disciples know, and they believe.

It would be a mistake to simply read this story as a one-dimensional account of a supernatural deed on the part of Jesus. Such a reading would turn this, the first sign of the advent of the messiah, into little more than a parlor trick, albeit an impressive one.

Jesus' deed is rich with symbolism. The jars that were used were not ordinary jars. These were the jars used for purification. For the washing of hands and feet before meals. These jars represent the boundary rituals that separate the Jews from the Gentiles, marking them as God's own people. But, out of these jars is now drawn the finest of wine. The jars no longer signify boundary, but a Eucharistic grace, which is poured out for all in great abundance.

This is a story of grace. There's not an ounce of judgment in this story. It's about grace, 180 gallons of God's own grace.

And here, is where I had planned to end this sermon. But what a strange week it's been for us. For most of us this week, we'd have much rather had clean water than the finest of wine. And then we heard about the earthquake in Haiti. Suddenly our little water "crisis" didn't seem like such a big deal, only a minor inconvenience for most of us.

We saw on our televisions images of hell on earth: the bodies of women children and men, some barely alive, broken and bleeding, many others dead. We simply cannot imagine the human misery and agony. Our hearts break for the people of Haiti. They are our neighbors.

Suddenly, preaching on grace in abundance seemed a little hollow to me. It's hard to see them image of a battered and busied orphan or hear the story of grieving parents who lost a child and not wonder somewhere in the back of our minds that awful question, WHY?

Then Pat Roberson had to open his big mouth and propose a reason: The Haitians deserve it, because over 200 years ago they made a pack with the devil to win their freedom from France.

It's absolutely appalling and unconscionable to suggest such a thing in the face of human misery, but it is a classic answer to ageless question. People suffer because they've done something to deserve it. One can find such a theodicy throughout the Bible. But, the

Bible also challenges this view. The book of Job is a long, extended rejection of this very theodicy.

Sometimes people suffer for no good reason. Sometimes bad things happen to people when they've done nothing to deserve it.

Jesus also rejected the theodicy of retributive justice. Jesus identified deeply with the poor and the hurting of the world. He embraced lepers, dined with tax collectors, and showed nothing but mercy and grace to prostitutes.

“Blessed are the poor, he said, but owe to you who are rich and well feed.”

I find it nauseating that a preacher who has grown rich off the offerings of widows, would stand in judgment over a tiny, impoverished nation that has know little more than woe and suffering for generations.

“Blessed are the poor, but owe to you who are rich and well feed.”

But enough about Pat Robertson. He's a child of God, too, and we have to love him and pray for him, too.

Ultimately, I don't know why there is such suffering in this world. But when suffering is answered with compassion, God is there. When a mother who can't feed her children is given food, God is there. When a thirsty child is given clean water to drink, God is there. When a hurting body receives medical care and treatment, God is there.

God gives us grace in abundance, God gives us an overflow of compassion and mercy, and so now we must do likewise. We must show Haiti, the poorest nation in the western hemisphere, grace in abundance, food in abundance, medicine in abundance, water in abundance, love in abundance.

AMEN.