

## **'What has this to do with me?'**

**(Jn. 2:1-11)**

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Two points are often made about the story of the wedding at Cana: first, that Jesus attended a wedding, so marriage is good; and second, Jesus turned water into wine, so wine is good. Yet there is more to see in this passage. It's a story full of meaning. We are meant to read this story on two levels. On the surface level, Jesus does a miracle – what John calls a 'sign', (Jesus will do more signs, seven by the end of the gospel.) – and it causes his disciples to believe in him. Each sign works as a clue – a signpost to who Jesus is. On a deeper level, we read that the wedding takes place 'on the third day', pointing to the end of the gospel when something else will take place on the third day. This is a wedding feast, a great banquet, which Israel's prophets used as a image of Israel's hopes in God's establishment of a messianic age:

'On this mountain  
the LORD almighty will prepare  
a feast of rich food for all peoples,  
a banquet of aged wine...  
On this mountain...  
He will swallow up death forever.'  
(Is. 25:6-8)

'As a young man marries a young woman,  
so will your Builder marry you;  
As bridegroom rejoices over his bride,  
so will God rejoice over you.'  
(Is. 62:5)

'The days are coming, declares the Lord,  
when the reaper will be  
overtaken by the ploughman,  
and the planter by the one treading  
grapes,

new wine will drip from the mountains  
and flow from all the hills,  
and I will bring my people Israel  
back from exile.'

(Am. 9:13-14)

It also says Jesus and his disciples were 'invited to the wedding', a closer translation would be they were 'called' to the wedding, that is they had been chosen. I make this point, because in the next chapter of John's gospel, John the Baptist reappears and speaks of Jesus as the 'bridegroom' (Jn 3:29), picking up the wedding theme again. John's gospel does nothing by accident, so here we see again, that the wedding at Cana is a means of talking about the great wedding that is to come, where Jesus is the bridegroom and those who follow him are his bride, who have been called to attend.

If this wedding banquet evokes images of Israel's hope, we are told that the wine has run out, there is none left; that which makes life good has gone: it has been replaced by sin and exile. The world has run dry of that which makes for flourishing, that which makes for life and living. Another way of reading this is that Jesus' own life will run out: he will be tried, persecuted and crucified.

Jesus responds to this lack of wine, by turning six stone jars of water each holding eighty to one hundred and twenty litres into wine. That is a lot of wine. That is too much wine. And it's the best wine. Jesus, on the third day, offers better wine than ever. Not just restoration, but resurrection. The miracle is not water into wine, but the generous provision of

superior wine.<sup>1</sup> A world gone scarce receives the abundant grace of God. Jesus is the one full of grace and truth and out of his fullness we are overwhelmed by grace. We will hear later Jesus say, 'I have come that they might have life, and have it to the full' (Jn. 10:10). This is the revelation of his glory. The blessings of God in and through Jesus will surpass all the blessing already given by God to Israel.

The deeper truth of this story is it points to the truth of the whole gospel – like water into wine, he will turn servants into friends, death into life, rejection into reconciliation, shame into glory. Of course, this deeper meaning perhaps only really comes apparent on a second reading; like a good book, or a good film, it is on the second reading or viewing, that events early in the story, point the way to that which will come later. Here some of us over the Christmas break may have been reading a certain novel by a certain Professor of Systematic Theology in this college, which is a story of young man taking a second look at different paintings and discovering new truths, much like us probably if we re-read the novel. Or others have perhaps have made multiple viewings of the latest Star Wars film, each re-viewing, seeing something new. In a similar way we might revisit stories of our lives and see that the grace of God was already at work, quietly, in the background, but very much present.

This first sign is only seen by Jesus' disciples, Jesus is not the wedding entertainment doing tricks for the guests. This miracle is done quietly, in the

background. The focus of the wedding guests remains on those being married, it is not yet Jesus' hour. And that it is not yet Jesus' hour, sets us on journey forward towards that hour in which we will expect the glory of Jesus to be displayed again. The great surprise is that the glory of Jesus will be seen in his body hanging on a cross. There will be a moment when the attention will be on Jesus, but it won't be the joy of a wedding, it will be the sorrow of a death: the wine will run out, Jesus' blood will be shed. And yet this will not be the end, more wine will come, better wine, and it will be life-giving, and its source will be the life of the risen Jesus.

Jesus comes to us in the darkness, Jesus comes to us when the wine has run out, where we have run dry and instead of giving us a sip, he offers a long drink of the best he has, which is himself. In him is life. This is to read the story personally, we might also read it politically. If this story is one of a wedding scene – a domestic event – the next story John tells is of Jesus clearing the temple – a decidedly political scene.

The wedding scene comes first, it speaks of the abundance Jesus brings as God's promised messiah. The temple scene that follows, speaks of the ending, the terminating of that way: temple is an old wineskin, and Jesus is the new wineskin. Jesus comes to transforms by home and temple. We mistake Jesus if you suggest it is only about a personal relationship with him, Jesus brings a revolution that will turn our patterns of power and governance on their head as well, and he

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<sup>1</sup> M. M. Thompson, *John* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 2015), p. 58.

will do it through the promise of too much wine,<sup>2</sup> too much bread; in other words, in him is the source of life, in him is the truth, in him is the power, in him is the light, in him is salvation.

In a world where there doesn't seem to be enough and we're looking for someone to blame, Jesus offers too much wine, that's his response, not to protect what he has, not to cheat others, not to take by force, but to overwhelm us with blessing, this is the politics of Jesus: the wine never runs out!

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<sup>2</sup> The language of too much wine, too much bread comes from Sam Wells, *God's Companions* (Blackwell, 2006), 18-19.