

**Are You Enjoying the Wine?**  
**By Reverend Litton Logan**  
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**Scriptures:**

**John 2:1--12 (NRSV)**

<sup>1</sup>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. <sup>12</sup>After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days.

**Sermon:**

It is believed that people in John's community of faith had most likely been kicked out of the synagogue, as well as rejected by other Jewish Jesus-believers, who did not hold as an extreme perspective on Jesus as the Messiah as did the author. Therefore, when we read John's Gospel, know that we are looking through a portal in time into a theological hornet's nest in the author's greater Jewish community.

John strives to show the unique nature of Jesus as the Son of God to combat all attempts to either cast him into the mold of a Greek demigod, a Gnostic Revealer, or just a great and powerful Jewish prophet. In John's Gospel, Jesus is a one-of-a-kind and his source of power is not something tacked on to his humanity but comes from his sharing in the very nature of God. As the opening verses of the Gospel declare, Jesus is the incarnation of God's divine reasons behind creation.

In today's scriptures, Jesus and some of his disciples are accompanying his mother to a wedding. The wedding would have been for a family member. I think in these scriptures we may also gain some insights into the humor surrounding the stereotypical Jewish mother that has been made famous by so many Jewish comedians.

Weddings in Jesus' day could go on from seven to fourteen days. Families scrimped and saved for a long time to host a wedding, often involving the resources of the extended family and village. In our story, the wedding feast runs out of wine - a social catastrophe that would bring shame upon the hosting family for generations.

Jesus' mother's comment that they have run out of wine on the face of it appears to be simply a statement of fact. However, any Jewish son worth his salt knows this is a prompt for him to do something about it. Instead, Jesus responds to his mother in a very courteous but formal manner, distancing himself from family and cultural claims on his life, by asking, "Woman, what have I to do with you," or said another way, how does this create a crisis for us,

but in particular for me? The implication for the reader, who knows about Jesus' power, is that his mother also knew and wants Jesus to use it to solve the wine problem. Jesus tells his mother it is not time for him to reveal himself, alluding to his coming out and assuming his Messianic mission, which will inexorably lead to his final revelation on the cross and his glorification. In effect, these passages tell the listener or reader, "Keep going, you ain't seen nothin' yet; all will be made clear in the end."

Jesus' mother, according to the humor about Jewish mothers, does the typical Jewish mother thing - she ignores Jesus' protestation. I mean he may be the son of God, but after all she bore him, birthed him, and raised him, so she has some motherly rights. This is not unlike the Jewish mother who told her son that he was now old enough to have his own opinions about things and she was going to give them to him.

There are said to be two theories on how to successfully argue with a Jewish mother. Unfortunately, as we see in our text today neither ignoring nor reasoning will not work. Jesus' mother says to those servants in attendance, "Do whatever he tells you to do." See what I mean, she knew he was going to do something, she just didn't know what. This is a critical point in these scriptures because we have a woman taking the lead, issuing orders to men since the word for servant in Greek is masculine, and things are about to radically change in the world's understandings of God as well as how one relates to God.

Jesus tells the servants to fill the large stone jars, standing nearby, with water. These jars were used to hold rain water or running water for ritual washing. They did so. Then he told the servers to take a jug of the liquid from the jars to the person in charge of the wedding festivities. The wedding steward tasted the wine and raved about it to the bridegroom, complimenting him on saving the best wine until the last. The custom at weddings was to serve the cheaper wine, the Two-Buck-Chuck from Trader Joe's, after everyone had gotten a bit tipsy and anesthetized their pallets with the good stuff. Although the good stuff may be an exaggeration.

I say this because records indicate that wine in Israel, during biblical times was awful and when exported to Egypt, it often had to be seasoned with honey, pepper, and juniper berries to make it palatable.<sup>1</sup> The wine of Jesus' day was made a little more drinkable by flavoring it and watering it down. Wine, nonetheless, as the Psalmist tells us, gladdens the heart, and in general was viewed as a divine gift. (Psalm 104:15)

I imagine we all were impressed with that little story, weren't we? While Jesus' mother was being a pushy Jewish mom, and Jesus a reluctant but acquiescent son, we were distracted and didn't notice that God ushered in the latest and greatest increment of God's coming rule and reign in the human condition right under our noses.

Did you notice that part about "on the third day", foreshadowing the tomb and the resurrection? Did you catch the jars used for religious purity rites were filled with water most likely drawn from a well, considered ritually impure water? This ritually impure water was turned into a top of the line wine for the Messianic age. A metaphorical reality we celebrate every Sunday at the Communion Table.

Wasn't it wonderful that in John's mind God chose to reveal the divine self in response to running out of wine at a wedding feast because of a human act of mismanagement? However, in God's new kingdom there will be no running out of wine and there will be no cheap stuff like Ripple, Thunderbird, or Two-Buck-Chuck from Trader Joe's, much less any requirements for ritual bathing. No, sir're, there will just be 1787 Chateau Laffite, worth \$160,000 dollars a bottle, running free at an eternal wedding feast for Jesus and his bride, the Church, made up of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/wine>, accessed 01/18/2019

all sorts of people. It is a time when people from all walks of life, some of whom have mismanaged their lives terribly or people like John and his community of faith, who don't fit the mold of orthodoxy, are invited and made acceptable in God's love made known in Jesus the Christ.

However, did you also see Jesus' mother, mentioned only here and at the foot of the cross, for just a split second was changed in to Eve - the "woman", the temptress - as she tried to get Jesus to jump the gun and reveal his divine glory prematurely? However, unlike Eve, Jesus' mother quickly defers to God's will in Jesus by saying, "do whatever he tells you", and thereby obliterates the stereotype and the stigma of Eve for women of faith forever more.

I mean Jesus could have done nothing, walked away, and left the families to their dishonor, but he didn't. Why? Well, let's look a little closer at Jesus' mother's words when she defers to Jesus. Jesus' mother, like some female Moses, says to the servants of God and the disciples of Christ across the ages that we are to forego our willfulness and cultural, religious mores, and do what "God" in Jesus tells us to do, as strange as it may sound.

In John's Gospel, looking beyond the obvious to the significance of his metaphors, the author affirms the essential nature of humankind's relationship to the Holy as one grounded in God's love, gladdening the heart and comforting the anxieties of the human condition. John understands that the first wine of Jewish traditions may have dulled the religious consciousness in his community; however, the new wine of Jesus revives and invigorates the spiritual pallet so all may taste the new thing God was doing in Christ.

I find it amazing that the person in charge of the wedding was simply impressed with the new wine. I wonder if John is here referring to those in the synagogues that didn't or couldn't recognize God's presence in Jesus as the Christ because their senses had been dulled by their expectations of the Messiah or satiated in their religious comfort. The chief steward seems unaware of the source of the wine and just assumes the bridegroom has deviated from tradition and kept the best for the last.

It is interesting that the servants didn't tell him the source of the wine. Maybe they thought the chief steward would not believe them, so they didn't speak of things that defied expectations just like so many people today can't believe the Christ is so freely offered to humanity sans religious orthodoxies and works. Truth is - there are none so blind as those who cannot see beyond their expectations.

However, I think the real wonder of this story in John's Gospel is that as the water was being turned into wine right in front of our very eyes, Jesus of Nazareth, the guest at the wedding disappeared - poof - and when next we see him he is affirmed and on his way to Calvary. His disciples see Jesus' wondrous act and they believed in him; that is, they believed that he was the Prophet-Messiah foretold by Moses, but will they come to believe more?

Eventually, in John's Gospel, Jesus will be revealed to people across the ages as the mighty Son of God, Lord of Life and Nature, the one who comes to the most common of people, in their most common settings, in their most mismanaged states, asking them to follow him. And those who follow him are given joy, gladness of heart, spiritual direction, and security in this life and beyond.

From this point on in John's Gospel, John will gradually build on one revealing sign after another, culminating in the greatest and most revealing sign of them all - the cross. In John's Gospel, on the cross we see Jesus as the fullest manifestation of God in human flesh, reconciling the world unto the Divine Self. All this starts in the most common of human settings - the joy and hope of a wedding, which anticipates the mysterious, life giving and life affirming union of a man and woman in marriage.

As impressive as the turning water into wine was, who among John's audience or ours for that matter could have anticipated that God, the Holy Self, Creator-Sustainer of All Life, would simply show up at a wedding, in some little backwater town in Galilee, and save a family from social dishonor at the behest of a pushy Jewish mother?

Like so many across the ages, we anticipate God's earthly manifestations in grand, supernatural performances. People anticipate God appearing in power and majesty in the Temple, a great cathedral, or a big, revival meeting. Across the ages, people have expected God to come into the human condition per doctrinal creeds, denominational expectations, or silly, human paradigms of religious power. Oh, how wrong we have been; oh, how wrong we are.

John in the metaphors of his gospel will tell us that God's divine love defies all our expectations and exceeds our greatest hopes in Jesus of Nazareth, who first revealed himself to the world as the Christ at a wedding feast in ancient Galilee - a wedding where we are welcomed and the honored guests.

Are you enjoying the wine?

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