

John 2:1-11

I will begin with a little known fact: In the official Bible of the United Methodist Church, Jesus' second miracle was turning the wine back into grape juice. Welch's grape juice, specifically.

I'm joking, of course. There is no official UMC Bible, though I'm sure some Methodists would be happy if that's how the story actually went.

Now John says this was the first miracle of Jesus. I don't think we know for sure what his second miracle was. And to be honest, there's a lot we really don't know about this story, either.

John tells us of Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River, near Jericho, in Judea. He stays in Judea for a couple days, picking up his first disciples. Then he returns to Galilee, picking up a couple more. Then Mary goes to be a guest at a wedding, and Jesus and his disciples go along, as well.

Whose wedding was it? We don't know. It seems very likely that it was a relative of Mary and Jesus. Mary seems to be involved in running the affair, which would make sense if she was a relative.

One possibility, and an old tradition in the Church, is that it was John's wedding. We know John was one of the youngest disciples, so perhaps he was at the age of marriage, which would be about 18-20 for men. And an old tradition says that James and John were Jesus' cousins, the sons of Mary's sister, Salome. So, this is a possibility, and he would certainly remember this miracle in particular, if that were the case. But we don't know for sure.

We don't even know for sure where the wedding was. It was in Cana, right? Well, there were actually two villages called Cana in first century Galilee. Kefar Kana seems more likely, since it was only three miles north of Nazareth. Khirbet Kana was another five miles or so further north. But we're not sure which it was.

Wherever it was, and whoever's wedding it was, the wine ran out. This was a big deal and a source of great shame for the groom and his family.

Weddings were a big deal in that culture. Weddings always started on a Wednesday, unless the bride was a widow who had been married before. Those started on Thursday, for some reason. There was a wedding ceremony at sunset, and this was followed by seven days of feasting and celebration. The groom's parents provided the food and drink, which was paid for in large part by gifts given by guests. And they

invited a lot of guests. Entire villages would be invited, in many cases. Running out of food or drink would be an enormous embarrassment.

A friend of the groom would serve as the master of ceremonies. One of his duties was to control the distribution of food and wine to be sure they didn't run out. He would sample the wine and then determine how much water should be put in it, usually two or three parts water to one part wine. Wine was typically watered down in that culture. Otherwise, people would get drunk, and drunkenness was both uncommon and unacceptable in first century Jewish culture.

The reason they drank wine all the time is because it was safer than drinking water. Water was typically not safe to drink by itself. As I saw on a sign one time, "In wine, there is wisdom. In whisky, there is freedom. In water, there is bacteria." So put a little wine in it to make it safer to drink. But not too much, or everyone gets smashed.

Mary goes to Jesus about the problem. Is she expecting him to do a miracle? Not likely. Especially not if this is his first miracle, right? I think she's asking more in terms of "Jesus, there's a problem. They're out of wine. Do something. Go buy some. So these folks aren't put to shame!"

Jesus' answer is strange, and we don't know exactly how to understand it. He says, literally, "Woman, what have I to do with you?" This was actually a common expression in that time. It could be said in anger. But it seems more likely to mean that Mary has misunderstood something here. Especially, when Jesus follows up by saying, "My hour has not yet come."

Jesus' "hour" in the Gospel of John always refers to the cross and suffering. It seems Jesus is saying, "Once I start down this road, it leads inevitably to the cross." Maybe Jesus, being fully human, is reluctant to start a difficult journey? Aren't we all? Maybe Mary is giving him a push out the door when she tells the servants, "Do what he tells you?" Again, we don't know.

But Mary does seem to have bold faith, the kind of faith that doesn't take no for an answer.

Jesus directs the servants to fill six large water jars nearby. These vessels were for the water required for ritual purification of the feet when one came into a home and the hands before eating. The jars are filled and the water turns into wine.

Many Bible scholars point out that there is a parallel here between Jesus' first miracle and the first miracle of Moses. Jesus turns water into wine. Moses turned the

water of the Nile into blood. So there's at least a similarity in these first miracles. Now, I'm no fan of wine, but even I will admit that it tastes better than blood.

The master of ceremonies assumes a natural explanation. "Oh, for some reason the groom kept the best wine aside till now. That's weird." But the disciples know the truth and they put their faith in him.

What does the miracle mean? It is a different miracle than most of what we see in Jesus' ministry. Most of his miracles were demonstrations of God's power to renew broken things: Healing the sick, casting out evil spirits, and such. Some were demonstrations of his power over natural forces, like walking on water or calming the storm. But this one is a little different.

One thing I would say about it is that it's a reminder of the power of God to turn the ordinary into the extraordinary. Water is ordinary; fine wine is extraordinary. Wine and bread are ordinary but in Christ they become an extraordinary sacred experience of the sacrificial death of Christ. Water is ordinary, but it becomes an extraordinary symbol of cleansing from sin and new life in Christ.

God can turn our ordinary lives into extraordinary experiences of his power and presence. He redeems the ordinary. He redeems the mundane and commonplace.

Second, the miracle reminds us that God gives more than we need. Jesus turns about 150 gallons of water into wine. I don't know how big this wedding was, but 150 gallons of wine is more than was required. Jesus gives us more than we need. At the beginning of his gospel, John says, in chapter 1, verse 16, "From his abundance we have all received one gracious blessing after another." Some Bible translations render that as, "We have received grace upon grace."

If our lives feel ordinary, if our lives feel empty, Jesus can redeem that. He can turn the ordinary into the extraordinary, the empty into the overflowing. He doesn't just fix what is broken. He makes it abundant and extraordinary.