

Title: Miraculous Encounter
Text: John 2:1-11
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It's the joy-filled setting of a family wedding that Jesus performs his first miracle in John's gospel. Let's jump straight in.

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.
(John 2:1-2)

Weddings in Jesus' day were elaborate affairs. It went something like this.

First there was the betrothal, or engagement, for at least a year. Then on the day of the wedding, the bridegroom and his friends would gather at his family home, and from there travel to the bride's family home. They would then take the bride, place her on a donkey or horse, and then parade her through the neighborhood. It was a procession that could take hours. It was a loud, raucous celebration.

They would then return to the groom's home and gather with family and friends for the marriage ceremony. They would offer their marriage vows to one another under the covering of a chuppah – a cloth suspended on four posts that symbolized that they made their vows under the covering, and in the presence of God.

The bride and groom would then go to a specially prepared room – a bridal chamber – where they were expected to consummate the marriage. There and then - while their families and friends waited outside the room!

Can you imagine? Talk about pressure!

After the bride and groom had sex, then and only then the party could begin. And the party would last not a few hours, but seven whole days of dancing and eating and drinking and laughing and celebrating. It was at Jewish wedding like this that Jesus, his mother and some of his friends were guests, in Cana, a small town about ten miles from Nazareth. Things were going well for a while, but then went pear-shaped. We read:

When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."
(John 2:3)

It was the responsibility of the groom's family to supply enough wine for all their guests for seven days. For the ancient Jews, having a wedding without wine was like cooking a barbeque without meat; unthinkable.

Jewish writings of the day said this:

There is no rejoicing save with wine, as it is said, 'wine makes glad the heart of man.'
(Talmud)

You can't have wedding celebration without wine and the wine had run out. It was a wedding disaster- a major embarrassment. Mary turns to Jesus and says, 'The have no more wine.'

Sue and I have very different personalities. I am an extrovert, she is an introvert. I use lots and lots of words, Sue chooses her words carefully and sparingly. You could be excused for thinking that I because I vomit out a lot of words that I am the better communicator, but you would be wrong. With very few words, Sue can communicate a lot.

For example, we can be sitting on the couch watching TV and Sue can say, 'The bins need to be taken out.' At first glance, it's a simple statement of fact. But I have learned those seven words are so much more than that. It is not simply a statement of fact, it is a requests – a call to action – an invitation to express my undying love and devotion to the wife of my youth and the mother of my children – by taking the said bins out.

With just seven words, 'The bins need to be taken out', Sue is challenging me to show that I truly and really love her.

Mary turns to Jesus and says, 'They have run out of wine'. It is not simply a statement of fact, although undoubtedly it is true. It's an invitation and challenge to Jesus to do something. And this is what happens:

"Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."
(John 2:4-5)

Jesus does not address her as Mary or mother, but as 'Woman'. Jesus was effectively saying that his commitment to his mission was far more important than his devotion to Mary as his mother.

But Mary knows. She knows that she knows, and Jesus knows that she knows. She knows that her son is special, and not just special in the way that all mothers say their sons are special, but special in the way that God told her through the angel Gabriel that Jesus was special, even as he rested in her womb.

Mary's confidence in Jesus was not in what she thought, but what God had said.

And so she says to the servants to do whatever Jesus says. Let's read on:

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew.

Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."
(John 2:6-10)

Jesus takes ordinary things and does something extraordinary. The ordinary things were the six stone jars. Under Jewish custom, unlike jars made of clay, stone jars were free from impurity and so the water stored in them could be used for washing before meals, and for the washing of meal utensils.

The stone jars were big; the six of them combined contained around 500 liters of water when the servants filled them up following Jesus' instructions. When they draw some of what they think is water out, as Jesus instructed them, and as the wedding caterer sips it – something astonishing has happened – a miracle. Not only is the water now wine – its Grange Hermitage, \$500 a bottle quality wine.

The caterer is so amazed he questions the bridegroom why he has saved the best to last – when at last some of the wedding guests are likely to be alcohol affected, and so not appreciate how good the wine actually is.

The servants know what has happened; the wedding party and wedding guests are completely unaware. The other witnesses to the miracle are the disciples who were with Jesus. This is what we read:

What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.
(John 2:11)

Let's spend a few moments reflecting on the significance of what has just happened. There is so much rich symbolism in this story that points to the beauty of Jesus. This is a miracle that points back, forwards and up.

This is a miracle that point back.

First, the stone jars were representative of Jewish law and custom. Jesus takes these sacred vessels and fills them with an amazing new gift – water turned into wine. In doing so, Jesus was not dismissing the Jewish customs and law as unimportant; instead he was investing in them a wonderful new gift.

The jars were half empty with water and now were full to the brim with the best wine. Jesus was creating something wonderful and new in the midst of the old.

Then there was the wine. Although this was an extraordinary act of generosity, Jesus was not simply having pity on a soon to be embarrassed bridegroom and his family. For Jews, wine was more than a social lubricator. Wine – free flowing wine – was a symbol of God's presence, and the presence of the long awaited messiah especially. Amos prophesied that when Israel's messiah comes:

The reaper will be overtaken by the plowman and the planter by the one treading grapes. New wine will drip from the mountains and flow from all the hills.

(Amos 9:13)

By turning the water into wine, right at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus hints at the astonishing truth that he is the long awaited messiah, and that in his presence God was ushering in the new age.

This was not simply a miracle of provision; it was a miracle of revelation. The disciples did not miss the point. They got it and they believed in him.

This is a miracle that points forward.

It's a miracle that points back to fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, and it a miracle the points forward to the incredible gift Jesus will not offer only some wedding guests in Cana, but the whole world.

In one of the seven miracles that Jesus performs in John's gospel he turns water into wine, and in another he multiplies a few loaves of bread into a feast for thousands. Later still he would take bread and wine at a Passover meal and tell his disciples that the bread represented his body about to be broken on a cross, and the wine his shed blood – poured out as a ransom for many.

This is a miracle that points up.

This is a miracle that reveals the character and nature of God. Jesus' miracle is extraordinary in terms of both the amount of wine produced and its quality.

Five hundred litres of wine is more than enough than could reasonably be required for the remainder of the wedding celebrations. And quality wine was more than enough, and probably wasted on already 'tired and emotional' guests.

Jesus provides more than enough.

The bridegroom did not deserve this miracle. It was likely his poor planning that led to the shortage. Jesus gave what the bridegroom could not pay for or provide.

The wine was a gift unearned, unmerited, undeserved and unexpected. The wine was a gift of grace.

Grace is the undeserved, unmerited, unearned favour of God.

Right at the beginning of his gospel, John says this about Jesus:

Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given
(John 1:16)

The Amplified translation says it powerfully this way:

For out of His fullness (abundance) we have all received [all had a share and we were all supplied with] one grace after another *and* spiritual blessing upon spiritual blessing *and* even favor upon favor *and* gift [heaped] upon gift. (John 1:16)

Through Jesus' miracle, the bridegroom and the wedding guests received more than they deserve and could reasonably expect. They experience an extraordinary gift of grace.

Jesus could have provided just enough wine to save the bridegroom from embarrassment. He could have provided wine just good enough to drink.

But we don't worship a just enough God; we have a more than enough King.

We don't have a 'close enough is good enough' messiah; we have a more than enough Lord.

Jesus repeats the more than enough miracle at Cana again and again. He takes five small loaves of bread and two fish, turning them into a picnic for crowd of thousands, with baskets full of leftovers. More than enough.

Jesus' miracle points up to the more than enough God we have.

Here and elsewhere, Jesus reveals that we have:

A pressed down shaken together running out all over God.
A baskets full of leftovers God.
An abundantly more than we ask for or imagine God.
A high and wide and deep God.
As far as east is from west God.
A cup overflowing God.
A no half measures, on a budget, rationing out, subject to limitations God.
An all of his love for all of his people all of the time God
...A more than enough God.

This is a miracle that points to us

The miracle at Cana points back, forwards and up. It also points to us. It points to us, asking us the question whether we believe in a '*more than enough God.*'

You see, the Wedding at Cana was a Red Letter encounter for the Disciples and Mary.

Because the disciples witnessed the miracle, John tells us that they believed in Jesus. The miracle was a sign that pointed to Jesus' identity as the Son of God.

The disciples saw the miracle and believed. But for Mary it was different.

Mary believed and so she saw the miracle.

Mary saw the need for wine and she saw her son and she had confidence and faith he could do something; that he has more than enough ability to overcome the scarcity.

She has confidence enough to ask Jesus to do something, and the confidence to believe he will, even after Jesus gently rebukes her with what others would have perceived as a 'no'.

Instead of sulking, instead of giving up, instead of retreating into silence – Mary instructs the servants to do whatever Jesus says.

Without knowing how he would do it, when he would do it or even if he would do it – Mary believed that Jesus had more than enough power to do it – to miraculously provide.

What was Mary's confidence based on? Was she simply a mother who believed that her son was special? Doesn't every mother think their son is special? No, this was much more than a fawning Jewish mother.

Mary's confidence was not based on what she felt, but on what she had been told. Before he was born, God had told her she was to bear his son – the long awaited Messiah. This was confirmed when Jesus was born through the witness of the shepherds who shared with her what the angels had told them – that this day the messiah had been born. The bible tells us that:

Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.
(Luke 2:19)

For thirty years Mary treasured in her heart what God had told her about her son – that he was the messiah, the saviour, the deliverer of God's people.

Faith to believe for the miraculous comes from hearing God's word, and then treasuring that word.

For thirty years she watched and waited and wondered – but always believed – and never gave up believing.

And then at a wedding at Cana, *'treasured in her heart belief'* became an *'on her lips act of faith'*.

Mary heard what God said, believed what God said and then acted on based what God said.

The disciples saw the miracle and believed; Mary believed and saw the miracle.

The Wedding at Cana points to us and asks us the question, 'Will we believe and act?'

You see like Mary, God has spoken to us. He has spoken to us though his word.

Our confidence in God's ability to provide is not in our feelings or wishful thinking, but in what God has said. Our confidence is in the promises in God's word – promises like this:

My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.
(Philippians 4:19)

You have heard what God says. Do you believe what God says? Will you act on what God says?

Just as there was an experience of scarcity at the wedding of Cana, some of us here this morning are experiencing scarcity right now.

Some of are experiencing scarcity in your finances. I am acutely aware how tough it is in our business, or to find a job.

Others of us are experiencing scarcity in our health.

Then there are those of us experiencing a scarcity of love, or even hope in a key relationship.

There are some of us in this room who wonder whether a family member or friend will ever open their lives to God, we desperately hope they will.

And at least some of us have come to the point of wondering if God even really cares.

Jesus' miracle at Cana testified not just to the fact that he was the long-awaited Messiah, but also that he was a Messiah that cared about the everyday stuff of everyday people in everyday life.

Do not fall for the devil's lie that God does not care!

God numbers every hair on your head.

God knew you even before you were conceived, and knitted you together in your mother's womb.

You are the apple of his eye.

God cares about you and every one of your needs more than you can possibly know or imagine.

And God will supply all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.

This is good news for those of us who need a miracle of provision this morning. God's ability to supply your needs is infinite, because the glory of Jesus is infinite.

We do not have to read about miracles in the bible as an interesting piece of history. But Jesus is present and powerful by his Spirit. God is the same yesterday, today and forever. His generous character is the same now as then. AW Tozer put it this way:

Anything God has ever done, he can do now. Anything God has ever done anywhere, he can do here. Anything God has ever done for anyone, he can do for you.
(A.W. Tozer)

We can experience a miraculous encounter with Jesus right here, right now by simply doing what Mary did:

Hear God's promises.
Believe God's promises.
Act on God's promises.

We act by asking. We act by humbly bringing our needs to God and asking him to provide for us out of his riches. One of the reasons some of us are not receiving what we long for is because we have forgotten to ask – or even given up. James says:

You do not have because you do not ask God.
(James 4:2)

You might be thinking that you don't have enough faith, and so don't want to offend God and disappoint yourself by asking. John Piper says:

Not going to God because your faith is weak is like not going to the doctor because you feel sick.
(John Piper)

The truth is that we are all weak here. But the far greater truth is our God is strong!

For some of us here this morning it's time to start asking, or if we gave up asking, to start asking again. For some of us it's time to believe for the first time, or to believe again for the miraculous. We are ordinary people loved by an extraordinary God. Vance Havner says:

Too many times we miss so much because we live on the low level of the natural, the ordinary, the explainable. We leave no room for God to do the exceeding abundant thing above all that we can ask or think.
(Vance Havner)

This morning ask and give God room to do the extraordinary. Open yourself up to the possibility of a Red Letter encounter with Jesus. Hear. Believe. Act.