

Introductory

This material is exclusive to John. This is the reading appointed for the First Sunday after the Epiphany in the TLH one-year lectionary. In LW, it's appointed for Epiphany 1C. They all omit v. 12, where John tells us what Jesus did after this; He went to Capernaum with his family and others, and stayed there for a few days. The omission seems odd.

Alcohol is involved in this true story. Americans, and especially some American Christians have some funny ideas about alcoholic beverages. Those ideas range from those who think alcohol is in and of itself necessarily a bad or evil thing and should therefore be avoided like the plague, to those who think it's a good thing to consume much of it and regularly.

The modern philosopher Homer seems to be on to something when he toasts, "to alcohol, the cause of, and the solution to all of life's problems," except that sometimes that's not the case. If you start off by saying that drinking is not a sin, but drunkenness is, then that's a good starting point in educating people about the place of alcohol in the Christian life.

The word used here to describe the liquid into which Jesus changed the water is "οἶνος – wine," and that word means just what it says. There is a Greek word for what we would call "grape juice," and this isn't it, and that word (truxi) does not appear in the NT. Given the lack of things like pasteurization and refrigeration, grape juice was rare.

Modern grape juice was not even invented until a little over a hundred years ago by Methodist Thomas Welch, a teetotaler who did not like the idea of being compelled to drink an alcoholic beverage in church – at the Sacrament of the Altar. He called it "Dr. Welch's Unfermented Wine" and marketed it to churches as something they too could use in the Sacrament.

Most Protestants are exclusively grape juice when they do the Sacrament – is it really? – and many (most) Lutherans offer it as an option, along with the next big option; gluten-free wafers. A man who identifies as an alcoholic told me that it's not so much that a sip will set you off, but that you drink a sip and you're okay, you think you can have two sips, and Katie bar the door!

I can tell them that the blood of Christ cannot possibly do you harm, and it can't, but if somebody insists, then he should probably take the Sacrament in one kind, a practice that is not without precedence, and is still done among many Christian communions. But to say that what Jesus did was change the water into grape juice is simply not true, nor does it have to be.

McLaren talks about the “new relationship” between Mary and Jesus with this incident. If you want to be hip and trendy in preaching, you could maybe talk about how Jesus has been living in His parents’ basement, working with Joseph in the carpentry business, and then He goes to be Baptized, gathers an entourage, and sets about adulting. That’s right, a new verb.

There’s an element of truth to that, sans the basement, which they didn’t have. Right before this, He had indeed chosen people to follow Him, and have John’s disciples begun to follow Him, and were they among the “disciples” who came to the wedding. After this, He goes to Capernaum with mother, brothers, and disciples in tow, then off to the Cleansing of the Temple, and it’s on!

Augustine has some very good material in Tractates 8 and 9. I quoted heavily from them and about them three years ago – hear it at the web site. He points out that God does miracles all the time – like changing water into wine – and we don’t even notice it. Nor should we be surprised that Jesus – He is God – is able to and does what He does at Cana.

Textual Notes

1. John tells us that this event took place “ἡμέρᾳ τῇ τρίτῃ - on the third day.” Many people have much to say about what this exactly means, and some come up with Thompson Chain Reference Bible-like compilations to show various intended symbolism. It meant that it’s what we would call Tuesday, what they would call “*yom sh'lishi*” which meant “the third day.”

Their week revolved around the Sabbath, like our week used to revolve around Sunday. These days, weddings are held on Saturday – an occasional Friday – because our lives revolve around the job. Make that jobs. In those days, and for current Jews, Saturday is Sabbath, and it’s a day of feasting and celebration, and it’s the last day you would schedule a wedding.

Even today, even the most liberal of liberal Judaism does not permit a wedding on the Sabbath or feast days. As a practical matter, work and travel are forbidden on that day. As a theological matter, as Maimonides puts it, “even on the common day of a feast they do not marry wives, as we have explained; because they do not mix one joy with another, as it is said in Genesis 29:27.”

Sunday as fun day is another thing the Protestants have ruined. You might have to remind your people again that the Sabbath forbids things like work and travel but encourages things like celebration and fun. For many Jews, Friday night sunset brings the beginning of consumption of alcoholic beverages, and that may well be the only time the person indulges during the week.

The Sabbath and the wedding are both joyful occasions, and you don't want to "mix one joy with another." As a practical matter, these things often lasted for several days. Tuesday – "hump day" on the Jewish calendar – works well. You didn't want to make it too early in the week, after the Sabbath, because feasting requires prep time.

You didn't want to make it too late in the week or you would run over into Friday sunset, the beginning of the next week's Sabbath. In addition to those practical considerations, one web site talks about a theological or maybe superstition or maybe traditional reason for Tuesday,

For much of Jewish history, the third day of the week (Tuesday) was considered an especially auspicious day for a wedding. This was so because, concerning the account of the third day of creation, the phrase "... and God saw that it was good" (Genesis 1:10,12) appears twice. Therefore, Tuesday is a doubly good day for a wedding.

Cana is located about five miles north of Nazareth, the home town of Jesus, for us a five-minute drive in the car, for them a short walk. Those who think the wedding is of a close relative of Mary are probably right. She acts like an aunt, and the close proximity of Cana to Nazareth also tends to indicate if not a relative, then a close friend of the family.

Mary is there, but she isn't called "Mary." Here, she is called "ἡ μήτηρ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ - the mother of Jesus," and two other times in this pericope she is likewise called similar things, but never is she called Mary. The point of the matter is that Mary's identity is tied up in her son, and it's about Him, not her, and if He isn't at the wedding, it's just another wedding.

Joseph is not mentioned. If Mary is not noteworthy outside of her son, then Joseph is even less so without her son. Looking at life expectancies, it's entirely likely Joseph is dead. Things like a high infant mortality rate, war, weather and disease shorted life considerably. The consensus seems to be early twenties to early forties for a male at the time of Jesus.

Scholars who conclude outside those parameters don't do so by much. The people at Bar-Ilan University have their best people on it at <https://faculty.biu.ac.il/~testsm/major%20trends.html>. If Joseph was twenty years old at the birth of Jesus – He is now thirty – then he would be fifty, well past that life expectancy. Or maybe he was living, at the wedding, and not noteworthy.

2. John, who later says – twice – that he had to leave a lot of material on the cutting room floor, spends an entire verse telling us that neither He nor His disciples were crashing the wedding; "ἐκλήθη δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸν γάμον – then Jesus was also invited and His disciples to the wedding." The "also" refers back to "the mother of Jesus," also invited.

As this thing plays out, Jesus sort of falls into His first miracle. What John tells us here is that Jesus did not get it into His head that it was time to get this show on the road, hey, let's go over

to Cana, and I'll change some water into wine! In fact, as we watch this thing play out, we detect a certain hesitancy on the part of Jesus to do what He ends up doing.

3. So far, just another wedding. And then, they ran out of wine. And then, the mother of Jesus said to Him, “Οἶνον οὐκ ἔχουσιν – they don't have wine,” which means just that, and it was a problem. You don't have to have beer – we didn't – to do a Christian wedding, but wine is all over the place in the Jewish wedding.

Wine, in the Jewish tradition, is closely associated with the Sabbath and with festivals. At the onset of the Holy Day, wine ushers in the spirit of sanctity, *kiddush*, and at the end wine closes it, *havdalah*. This accomplishes a significant task: It marks the boundary lines and separates the holiness of the Holy Day from the secular character of the ordinary day. At the wedding, the wine symbolizes both *kiddush*, sanctity, and *havdalah*, separation, as the blessing itself indicates: "...who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us about [some say 'separated us from'] illicit relations..." As wine is used at the threshold of the Sabbath to sanctify it and to separate it, so it is used at the threshold of marriage to separate it from the prohibited and to sanctify the bonds of proper marriage.

Wine is associated in Jewish tradition with *shirah*, song and festivity. As such it is appropriate to joyous occasions like the Sabbath and marriage. Both are not only to be observed, but need to be celebrated. Marriage is very similar to the Sabbath. Both are covenantal, reciprocal love relationships.

https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/481775/jewish/Wine-at-the-Jewish-Wedding.htm

It's another thing the Protestants have ruined. When we lived in Missouri, you couldn't buy any alcohol – not even beer or wine – on Sundays. Those Blue Laws have their origins in the brand of Christianity that sees all alcohol in any amount as intrinsically sinful, but they seem to be fading away there and in other places, and that's okay.

To run out of wine is a social faux pas, but the absence of it might well have meant that the entire festivities would grind to a screeching halt. For much of human history, fermentation has been a very reliable way to kill off things in water that might harm us. To have not wine to mix with the water would have meant that no water would be able to be consumed; dinner without water?

4. The interaction between Him and her is very human. She's not asking Him to make a wine run to Wal-Mart or CVS; she wants Him to make wine happen. My mother never thought I could just make wine happen, and neither does yours, but the mother of Jesus knew her son, and knew of what He was capable, and it turns out that she's right.

His response “Τί ἐμοὶ καὶ σοί, γύναι – what to me and you, woman” sound to us harsh, perhaps disrespectful, but that's not the case. Mary needs to stay in her own lane here, and Jesus tells her

that in a way that may actually be a euphemism, substituting a mild, indirect or vague term for one considered harsh, blunt, or offensive – whatever that means.

To call her “woman” is only profound to our sensibilities. In His day, it was a very common way for an adult man to address an adult woman. The word – it can also mean “wife” – occurs two hundred seventeen times in the NT, often used by Jesus, often of Mary. Later on (19:26), while on the cross, He addresses her “woman” and tells John to take care of her.

After that (20: 13), the angels address Mary M as “woman” when they ask her why she’s weeping, and then (20:15) Jesus calls her the same thing when He asks her the same thing. He calls her that, and then He tells her why He can’t do that; because “οὐπω ἤκει ἡ ὥρα μου – My hour has not yet arrived.” It’s all a matter of timing.

Later, (7:6), Jesus declined to attend a festival because “My time is not hers; for you any time will do” then He actually goes to the festival, but in secret. As the time for Crucifixion draws near, He says (12:23) “the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified,” and (12:27) “what shall I say? Father, save Me from this hour? Not it was for this reason I came to this hour.”

What we see here is a very human Jesus – who is God – struggling with the events that will be set into motion by this, the first of His miracles. It was one thing when, at His Baptism, the dove did what it did and the Father said what He said. Nobody before or since has done miracles like He does, and His miracle working will take it to the next level.

Knowing what will be set into motion by His doing what He is about to do, and knowing where that path will lead, He hesitates. If one can procrastinate without sinning, then Jesus is doing just that. Later on, He will very deliberately “set His face” to Jerusalem and the cross, but it’s not something to which He looks forward, as John spends the entire seventeenth chapter telling us.

5. John calls her “His mother” and has her saying to the servants “Ο τι ἂν λέγῃ ὑμῖν, ποιήσατε – whatever anyhow He should say to you, do.” The piling on of those particular words in those particular ways means that whatever He tells you to do, do it! The verb is an imperative; Mary is commanding them, telling them what to do, speaking as one who has authority to do so.

For her part, she knows of what her son is capable. She alone knows the origins of Jesus. She alone knows that she and Joseph had not jumped the gun, nor had she been unfaithful to her wedding vows. She alone knew for a certainty that the later charge of His being “born of fornication” was untrue. She alone knew that He could do what He is about to do.

6. From Sunday School art, we are quite familiar with the six stone pots. John acts like we would act when talking about a two-liter bottle of Coke or a five-gallon bucket of detergent, “κατὰ τὸν καθαρισμὸν τῶν Ἰουδαίων – like (the ones used at the rite) of purification of the Jews.” It’s an ellipsis, and I filled in the (blanks) for you.

Those stone pots were empty and not going anywhere, “κείμεναι, χωροῦσαι ἀνὰ μετρητὰς δύο ἢ τρεῖς – standing, having space for two or three measures.” According to The Website, a measure is about “39.9 liters, or 8.75 gallons.” Actually, 40 liters is about 10.5 gallons, so if we’re going to ballpark it, about ten or eleven gallons; one five-gallon bucket stacked on another.

7. You know how sometimes your wife, or a child will ask you if you could do something, and you tell them no you’re not going to do that, and then you go ahead and do it? Jesus told His mother that He wasn’t going to do what she wanted Him to do, and then “λέγει αὐτοῖς ὁ Ἰησοῦς Γεμίσατε τὰς ὑδρίας ὕδατος – Jesus says to them, ‘fill the jugs with water.’”

The verb is in the imperative; it’s a command, “καὶ ἐγένισαν αὐτὰς ἕως ἄνω – and they filled them to the brim” for a total of sixty-something gallons of wine, some of which would have been mixed with water, some of which would have been drunk straight. That is a large, rather than a small amount of wine, an amount that could not be done using slight of hand.

8. Using two more imperatives, He tells them to “Ἀντλήσατε νῦν καὶ φέρετε τῷ ἀρχιτρικλίνῳ - draw out and carry to the master of the feast.” The first verb is used four times in the NT, all by John, always to refer to drawing of liquid. The second verb occurs sixty-six times in the NT. It often has connotations of something done deliberately in the sight of people, to be seen by them.

Perhaps the most notable word here is the little word “νῦν – now,” spoken by the man who earlier (4) had said that His hour had not yet come. So now it is then. He does not look into the stone pots, like we would have, before telling the man to take the pots to the man, and obeying Jesus, because Mary told them to obey Jesus, “οἱ δὲ ἤνεγκαν – they carried them” to the man.

9. John calls what is in the pots “τὸ ὕδωρ οἶνον γεγενημένον – the water become wine.” That’s a perfect passive participle, speaking to the essence of the liquid, the perfect tense indicating past action with results that endure to the present time and into the future. The man in charge of the wine didn’t know where it came from, but he knew good wine when he imbibed it.

The man in charge of the wine is called the “ἀρχιτρικλίνος,” and we would call him the Caterer, but not the one who brings the food and drops it off for you to do with as you please. He’s the Caterer who has the venue and who takes care of everything from soup to nuts, who makes sure that the chairs and tables are set up, the food keeps coming, and likewise the wine.

Like the Aunt or Aunts used to do. the Aunt has been replaced by the Caterer, who is giving way to the Wedding Planner. For Greeks and Romans, that person would be somebody chosen from the assembled, and some Actual Bible Scholars think the Jews at the time of Jesus did this as well. One of them quotes from the Apocrypha,

Ecclesiasticus (35:1, 2): "If thou be made the master of a feast, lift not thyself up, but be among them as one of the rest; take diligent care for them, and so sit down.

And when thou hast done all thy office, take thy place, that thou mayst be merry with them, and receive a crown for thy well ordering of the feast."

If you want to see what a modern Jewish Wedding Specialist looks like, here's what one says on his web site,

I am a young, modern, unique and very passionate **Jewish Wedding Specialist**, which covers my role as **Jewish wedding** and events **Toastmaster ,Coordinator, Master of Ceremonies and Organizer**. My particular services includes, Taking The Stress of The Wedding day of The bride and groom and families, bringing direction to The day and evening(For Example:- Keeping The Photographer and Videographer a step ahead of what is happening at all times), Prepare The Itinerary and schedule for The clients, Coordinate with all suppliers both prior to and on The day of The function in question, Recommend lots of modern and unique touches that will make The day extra special for clients, Supplier Recommendations and why you recommend these, Working very closely with you in order to ensure your event or wedding is executed according to your wishes. officiating and announcing and lots more.

10. And he says to the bridegroom, “Πᾶς ἄνθρωπος πρῶτον τὸν καλὸν οἶνον τίθησιν, καὶ ὅταν μεθυσθῶσιν τὸν ἐλάσσω – every man first the good wine sets on (the table), and when they have become drunk, the inferior.” Many of the translations refuse to use the word “drunk,” probably having a theological axe to grind; the wine was non-alcoholic.

The word appears five other times, and it always clearly means “drunk,” and is it really a stretch to think of somebody getting drunk at the wedding reception? But we note here firstly that nobody is saying here that anybody is drunk at the wedding at Cana, which would have presented all kinds of ethical problems for the Son of God, wouldn't it?

The Feast Master is simply pointing out what usually happens at the wedding when it comes to better and inferior wines. But what if there were? We often find Jesus in the presence of sinners, and no, His being there doesn't mean He's condoning drunkenness, and if it does, then you had better exit every time you find yourself around a drunk.

This bridegroom is different, “σὸ τετήρηκας τὸν καλὸν οἶνον ἕως ἄρτι – you have guarded the good wine until now,” and we may have a pair, a double double entendre. The bridegroom is the man who is getting married, and the Bridegroom is Jesus. The wine is the beverage, and the wine is the beverage of the Heavenly Feast.

11. John calls this incident “ἀρχὴν τῶν σημείων ὃ Ἰησοῦς ἐν Κανὰ τῆς Γαλιλαίας – the beginning of the signs Jesus (did) in Cana of Galilee,” implying that more signs are to come – spoiler alert! – they do. A “sign” or “miracle” is a supernatural thing that goes against the Laws of Nature, which God invented, and which He can do what He wants.

Like angels speaking to people, signs are an uncommon thing in the Bible. Not many people do them, and Jesus does them all the time, and He does a lot of them, and a lot of different kinds. So many does He do that there isn't even close to enough room (20:30) for John to write them all down. Our miracle output – not so much.

When He did what He did, “καὶ ἐφανερώσεν τὴν δόξαν αὐτοῦ – and He revealed His glory,” an active verb; He is the One who actually decided whether or not He was do what He did; He decided to do it. The glory seen here is in the Messiah Who brings about the Messianic Kingdom and the celebration that goes with it.

Finally, “καὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς αὐτὸν οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ – and many of His disciples believe in Him.” It's significant that it does *not* say they believed in Him *because* of this miracle. When they came to the wedding, they are already “disciples,” people who have on some level bought in to Jesus. This miracle confirms to them that they're on the right track.

12. The lectionary leaves this verse off, and I'm not sure why. He went to Capernaum, taking with Him His mother, His brothers, and His disciples, “καὶ ἐκεῖ ἔμειναν οὐ πολλὰς ἡμέρας – and there they stayed not many days.” After those few days, we find Him with His disciples, but not mother or brothers, in Jerusalem for the Temple cleansing.

Nazareth was a small town where everybody knew everybody's business. Capernaum is currently being excavated, and new discoveries are being made all the time. For what it's worth, archeology tells us that the population was about 1,500 at the time of Jesus. Not a large city, but a place where somebody like the family of Jesus could get lost.

Whenever somebody wins the lottery, he finds out how many long-lost friends and distant relatives he has. The same can be said for those who become famous athlete or entertainers and the like. The miracle at Cana was done in public sight, and word of it would have spread like wild-fire, and what would life be like for them in Nazareth.

We don't know why the family of Jesus went to Capernaum instead of returning to Nazareth. It's possible that they had moved there before this, and would therefore be returning home to Capernaum, which Matthew calls it “His city” (9:1), and it was the home of several of the fishermen Apostles.

We fast forward to the return of Jesus to Nazareth, and how did that work out? They seem to have been poised to pounce on what should have been their Favorite Son, and when He said what He said, they did what they did. You wonder if – by that time – they were sick of hearing about and seeing the “perfect” Jesus. You know how people are.

And now this! Imagine life for the family of Jesus on the heels of the miracle at Cana.

Hymns

LSB 408 – Come, Join in Cana’s Feast
LSB 394 – Songs of Thankfulness and Praise
LSB 409 – Hail, O Source of Every Blessing
LSB 627 – Jesus, Christ, Our Blessed Savior
LSB 398 – Hail to the Lord’s Anointed
LSB 849 – Praise the One Who Breaks the Darkness

Sermon Titles

Just Another Wedding

Jesus is Adulting

Then Something Happened

Don’t Get Stuck

Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Sign

Rev. Steven L. Anderson
Pastor, Immanuel Lutheran Church
Grand Mound, Iowa