

2ND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY

JANUARY 20, 2013

THE RICHNESS OF GOD'S GRACE

Pastor Jim Dunn

John 2:1-11

The Wedding at Cana

1 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. 3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

6 Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.[a] 7 Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. 9 When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." 11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

What would you pay for a can of air?

People who drink fine wines talk about the price of a bottle of wine. They discuss the difference between the cost of a fine wine and an everyday good dinner wine. So, what would about the cost of a fine can of air? Not just any air. We're not talking here about the kind of canned air you use to blow away dust. We're talking canned air from Paris or Venice.

Yes, this Christmas you could have given someone special in your life the gift of air. A photographer by the name of Kirill Rudenko actually sells canned air from the cities of Paris, Venice, London, Berlin, and Tokyo. Each three-and-a-half inch can comes with a wine bottle type of label that lists the contents of the can. The label on the canned air from Paris says the contents are 25% air from the Eiffel Tower. The label on the canned air from London says that the contents are 20% air from Buckingham Palace. The label on the canned air from New York says the contents are 10% air from Times Square, and adds that this "fresh air" from New York "relieves stress, cures homesickness and helps fight nostalgia."

That sounds odd, doesn't it? What's even odder is that those empty cans sell for \$10 each.

But is that any odder than Jesus making wine for His first miracle? Of all the miracles this world needs, that Jesus would provide about 200 bottles worth of reserve wine for a wedding just seems odd, until we remember that this wasn't the only time Jesus provided in abundance for someone's dinner table. Two hundred bottles of wine is nothing compared to providing enough fish and bread to feed over 5000 people.

So maybe providing wine as His first miracle wasn't so odd, but Jesus' conversation with His mother was odd, don't you think? She said to Him, "They have no wine." And He said to her, "*Woman*, what does this have to do with Me?" Doesn't that seem odd, until we remember that Jesus addressed His mother the same way when He hung on the cross? There at the cross He tenderly provided for her by placing her in the care of John: "*Woman*, behold your son. Son, behold your mother."

Indeed, John framed his Gospel with these two brief, intense conversations between Jesus and His mother, because she was the perfect example for us of faith. John says that he wrote his Gospel so that we may *believe* that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. We are to have faith in Jesus as Mary did. We are to have a faith that prays. Bringing our problems and needs and requests to the Lord. Not necessarily knowing what He will do, but believing He is able to do far more than we ask and leaving it for Him to decide what He will do and when.

Such was the faith of Mary. Mary brought the wine problem to Jesus, because she believed He could do something about it. She was with Him at the beginning of His ministry, at the end of His ministry, and throughout His ministry, because she believed with that same humble faith that had once said to Gabriel, "Let it be to me as you have said."

So, don't you think it odd that Mary believed in Him and the disciples believed in Him, but those who most directly benefited from this miracle seemed unaware of it?

I'm talking about the master of the feast and the bridegroom. They conversed about reserving the good wine until now, but not one word was said about how that good wine had suddenly appeared. Now, doesn't that seem odd, until we remember that something similar happens in our own lives?

God is constantly blessing us. Yet, we are so often unaware, or act as if we don't believe it. We give thanks for warmth and sheltered care, while of God's richer gifts we're unaware. We say, "I believe that God has made me and all creatures, that He has given me my body and soul..." We say, especially at this time of year when we remember Roe v. Wade, that we believe that life is a gift from God.

But being aware of the rich gift of life, being thankful for it, valuing it in our bodies, in us, and in all others, involves far more than just voting against abortion.

First of all, abortion is not the only issue in which people are placing their rights above the lives of others. Second, if we believe that life is a gift from God, then why do we not take better care of our bodies? Why do we not see our doctor annually and do exactly what he tells us about exercise and diet and weight? Meanwhile, we starve our souls, as the hymn writer puts it? I never miss a meal. I don't give fasting even a second thought. But how many hours or days have I (and you) let go by without picking up a Bible or praying? We're sinners who sometimes behave as if we're completely unaware of the miracle of life God has richly poured out upon us. In that way, we are no different than the master of the feast or the bridegroom.

So, the only odd thing about this first miracle of Jesus is that He did it at all. Because taking that loving, irrational, beyond all comprehension step would put Him on a collision course with our sins. In that brief, intense conversation with Mary, Jesus reminded her, "My hour has not yet come." He's reminding her of the gravity of her request.

Does His mother realize that when He begins to do these signs, that when He begins to do those things that point to Him as the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, particularly the healing of the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus from the dead, it will lead to opposition from the religious leaders and hasten that hour when He will be crushed by our sins? Does she realize that when He steps onto this path, it will lead to His death? It's as if He's reminding Himself of the gravity of her request.

It's as if He stops and think rationally for a moment about what He's about to do. "My hour has not yet come." Yet, in the next moment He takes that irrational, loving step that is beyond all human understanding. He begins to direct the pouring of the water that He will turn into wine. A "pouring" that points ahead to the pouring out of His blood for our sins.

Jesus is the good wine held in reserve until now. For our forgiveness, He was poured out like a drink offering upon the cross, but not until the fullness of time had come.

Yet, now that that hour has come, now that He has died and risen for us, we are a new creation. Water has become wine. Sinners have become saints. This miracle of wine at a wedding feast is the Messianic Age in miniature.

When the Lord reveals Himself to us in such a way that there is great joy in His presence, an awareness of the richness of His blessings. It's why Jesus providing an abundance of wine for a first miracle was so fitting. Abundance and wedding feast and wine are signs of the new creation which the Messiah came to inaugurate and will, on the Last Day, fulfill.

Isaiah prophesied, "The Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine, the best of meats and the finest of wines." (Isaiah 25:9) And we heard from his prophecy in today's Old Testament reading: "But you shall be called 'My delight is in her' and your land 'Married'...For as a young man marries a young woman, and as a bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." In this hour, those words of promise are poured into your ears and the body and blood of Jesus into your mouth, and you are a new creation in faith and prayer and *thanksgiving* and awareness of God's rich gift of life.

Amen