

Water into Wine

John 2:1-11

SIGNS

WHAT SIGNS SHOW US

Show the way

Give information

We are given signs in John's gospel – pointers to us to show who Jesus is, to tell us about Him, to show what he has come to do for the human race, to show us that we need to follow Him. Jesus made a difference and we are called to follow Him and make that difference too.

LIST OF MIRACLES

As I said last time, John's gospel gives us seven miraculous signs and here they are again. There is an eighth in John 21 and I'm sure we'll mention that again. So here we are at the first and actually John presents it as the first miracle too. John starts his recollection of the story of Jesus' public ministry with being identified by John, how he met his first disciples and at the start of chapter 2 we come to day three: Jesus' first miracle.

THERE'S FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING

First time for anything is something we often mark and remember – first steps, first day at school, first girlfriend or boyfriend, first job. Or first day of something new – opening of a new road, a new supermarket or whatever. All those things are landmarks, showing promise and potential for the future.

MAP OF CANA

Cana was a landmark in Jesus' ministry and it all happened at this village 8 miles or so from Nazareth. It was at a wedding that Jesus attended. Being all Galileans, and being that Galilee was a small place, Jesus and his disciples were probably known to the family and it was a great occasion for the whole community. We read about the miracle: from six large jars of water came 180 gallons of finest wine.

SIX JARS OF WINE

I've got to say in times past this miracle used to cause apoplexy for teetotal ministers. I remember one minister I had who regarded it a great mystery why Jesus produced 180 gallons of the best wine. Was it truly alcoholic; was it miraculously unintoxicating?

Actually, wine is wine. If it's fine wine it's going to be relatively strong – in those days 8-10%. That said, whatever people did with the wine when they drank it was their responsibility. Israel in those days probably had the same wine culture as most Mediterranean countries today, where problems of bingeing, antisocial behaviour and alcohol abuse are much less than here in the UK. Their culture of wine is much different to ours.

So what was the significance of this sign to what we might learn about the ministry of Jesus and how may it make a difference to us?

Jesus has power over nature

So this was Jesus' first miracle. As He had only been in public ministry for 2 days, what was the expectation of Mary and His disciples. The wedding ran out of wine? When Mary finds out, she comes to Jesus: "They are out of wine". What was she expecting Him to do? A lot of commentators suggest that because Mary knew she had a remarkable son, she was expecting a miracle from Him.

But is this so? She may have heard and seen many things of Jesus. But a miracle. No. So what

was she expecting. Well, He was the carpenter from Nazareth. We know Joseph was off the scene so He was head of household. Contrary to what has been handed down by tradition, a carpenter was not an occupation of the humble poor who lived in hovels. Most people could do a lot more basic carpentry than we do these days as wood was the staple construction material. So a carpenter would go above and beyond that. He was a skilled artisan who could make the things ordinary people couldn't. We know Jesus was based at Nazareth, but because He was specialised, He would have been in demand all over Galilee – remember, it's a small place. I don't find it surprising that Jesus was often found in and around boats. He was a carpenter. He built them; He fixed them. And He was a guy who would know just about everyone.

And He was the guy you came to when you needed something, when you needed help because if He couldn't do it, He knew a man who could – because He was a skilled artisan who doubtless had a good reputation; because his disciples quite readily followed Him.

Back to Mary. What was she expecting of Jesus? If it wasn't a miracle, then she was expecting Him to be able to do something about it? He would know where you could get wine at short notice. That's my take on it.

What's enigmatic is Jesus' reply. For accuracy, here it is in the NRSV: "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." This one has also been debated over the years. What did Jesus mean? We know from the rest of John that Jesus' hour referred to the time when he would be captured, tried, crucified, killed and would rise again. So what is Jesus trying to tell Mary?

Think about it. I don't know how much he discussed His ministry with Mary. Surely He must have said something or even lots. But He's three days into His new job – and that is as a rabbi and the end He knew – to die and to be Saviour of the world.

His wording is interesting. John only refers to Mary as Jesus' mother, not by name. Jesus doesn't refer to her in a sonly way, but more formally. "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? In English addressing a woman as "woman" is rude but in those days it was a term of formal respect. Jesus addressed Mary formally and respectfully, not as His mother. There had been a change of relationship. He was no longer the carpenter of Nazareth. Something had changed. He was now the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He was now working towards that momentous conclusion, so why should he be involved in sorting out the mundane issue of where to locate a couple of hunderd gallons of any sort of wine for a wedding?

But Mary knew her son. She knew he would do something anyway so instructs the servants to do as He said. What did she think would happen? She was probably still scratching her head about his words "My time has not yet come." She probably thought that he would command them to pop somewhere and collect some wine from somebody.

We know what happens next. They have to fill six huge jars specially kept for water that was kept "holy" for purification right, fill them with water and take them to the master of the feast. And behold, they had top quality wine, much to the surprise of the master of the feast, the servants who knew what went into the jars, and Mary and the disciples.

They learned and we learn that Jesus has power over nature. In a sense it wasn't spectacular. Few knew about it -although you can bet word got round fast! But for the very fact that wine came from water – that was spectacular. It was the first of many instances where Jesus proved

that by His word, He had power over nature, confirming what John says as the beginning of His gospel. He was there at creation – of course He has power over nature. Of course he can change anything. He can do the impossible.

11 Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana in Galilee; there he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

We need to realise that. Jesus did the impossible then. He does the impossible now. How does that make a difference to my life or yours? It should.

Jesus does things that are according to the purposes of God and have significance to the world

Jesus did many miracles. But they weren't just stunts. They conveyed information about Him.

11 Jesus performed this first miracle in Cana in Galilee; there he revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

This miracle was primarily for Jesus' disciples, to start them on their journey of understanding what the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" is about. But think. It wasn't the miracles that made them follow Jesus. When they saw this miracle, they were already His disciples. They had never seen Jesus do a miracle before. What made them follow Jesus? It was the word of John and the fact that they almost certainly knew Jesus – probably did business with him. All the miracle did was cement that.

If you are looking for a miracle in order that your faith may be cemented, or that you won't follow Jesus unless you see one. Remember this. The disciples started to believe before they witnessed the miracle. Besides, what about the servants, what about the rest of the people who found out about the miracle. Did they believe? Did they become disciples? Actually, Peter needed three miracles before he truly became committed as a disciple.

Miracles arise from faith. They confirm and affirm our faith. God does miracles according to His purpose. As with other things, they impress some people; change their lives, but do nothing for others. We so often want miracles for us; for what we want for us: what we think a God of love should give us. But we have a God who can see the bigger purpose. Who can see eternal things. Who can see the whole of our lives.

If you are a Christian, then miracles are there. Open your eyes and see them, open your ears and hear them; but most of all pray for them, pray that they will make a difference. That they will make a difference for other people, for communities, for nations. Pray in faith, because in faith mountains can be moved because we have a saviour who has power over nature and who works the purposes of God out.

Jesus brings blessings through grace

What was so special about this couple that they benefited from this gift of wine. I would suggest nothing. We don't even know their names. At the time, only a few were "hands on" to what was happening, but everyone in the wedding party experienced the blessing.

We came to communion this morning to recognise that in His death and resurrection, Jesus performed on our part the most amazing miracle of all. He opened a way for our sins to be forgiven and to bring us into relationship with God.

God's grace is poured out on us, not because we are someone or something, but because he wants us, ordinary people to be blessed and to be someone and something to him. An interesting irony from this story is that Jesus commanded pots that were kept for purification water – water and containers put aside for ritual washing to be used. They were supposed to be kept separate, holy, special, pure and were not for the use of containing base products such as wine. You didn't ever use them for wine. That was a base thing to do.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH THE WINE?

What does it tell us? That the ritual wasn't important. The servants did something they were told they must never do: pollute the purification pots. But they were obedient to Jesus and the blessing came. What came out was wine. Interesting as we came here on a communion morning. Wine represents the shed blood of Jesus, which purifies us from our sins. Jesus has a sense of humour!

Jesus broke all the rules of religion to bring us life and hope and forgiveness. The wine that was produced that day was a – matter of grace. Jesus blessed them. Some recognised the blessing. To others it made no difference. Some enjoyed and appreciated the fine wine, others just got drunk on it I'm sure. Jesus shows us God's love, God's mercy, God's grace, but it's our responsibility what we do with the grace showed to us.

That's the challenge for us this morning. If we don't know Jesus then look at the bread and the wine. In His grace, God has done something for you. He makes you an offer of life and hope – what are you going to do about it?

If you know Jesus this morning then here's the challenge. We've experienced Jesus, now what do we do with the wine. The cup this morning signifies our cleansing, our fitness to be in God's presence. Now what are we going to do about it?

Look in the gospels and we see that through faith, people's lives were changed. Jesus made a difference and produced disciples who also later made a huge difference. If we already make a difference; remember Jesus who has power over nature – because we have a God who wants to make more and more of a difference through us. Let's begin to seriously pray for it.

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MRBC Felixstowe 6/10/13
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