

A Simple Story: a Wedding, a Miracle, a Relationship

(Research by my mother Marilyn McGinnis. *Happy Mother's Day, Mom!*)

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presb. Church of Newton, KS - May 9, 2021

Ten years ago there was a royal wedding of Prince William to Kate Middleton. It seemed the whole world wanted to watch that wedding. The preschool Jonathan attended had an annual Gala fundraiser and in 2011 they chose a wedding theme, complete with wedding photos, dancing, and a wedding cake. People love weddings.

Jesus used marriage to describe his own relationship to the Church: the Church is His bride and Jesus is the bridegroom. A wedding is a place of celebration and a time for a loving covenant. It is then no great surprise that the first miracle Jesus performed took place at a wedding. Jesus had just begun His ministry.

In fact, the wedding at Cana took place on a Wednesday, the last day of his first week of public ministry. We know this because Jewish weddings took place on Wednesdays. Jesus had been validated by John the Baptist as **“the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”** And he had been validated by God the Father at His baptism when God declared **“this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased”**.

Following this double validation, Jesus was now ready to choose the first of who would be His twelve disciples: first, Peter and Andrew, James and John. All four were partners in a fishing business. And then Philip who in turn

brought Nathanael. So when the wedding at Cana began, eight of the guests were Mary, Jesus and His six newly chosen disciples.

No one knows who the couple were, but some speculate that the bride or the groom may have been a relative of Mary's. At the very least they must have been close friends, for Mary had no qualms about giving directions to the servants.

Jewish weddings in the first century were joyous occasions, as weddings are today. But unlike a wedding today, a first century wedding lasted seven days and each guest was expected to bring a present of wine.

The bridegroom and his family paid for the rest of the food. The wedding was nearing the end of the seven days when Mary discovered the wine was completely gone.

To run out of wine was a serious matter. No bridegroom wanted to find himself in such an embarrassing position. Evidently Mary had been keeping track and when she discovers there is no more wine, she knows exactly how to remedy the situation. She goes to Jesus—the One who can solve the problem—and says simply, **“They have no more wine.”**

This is more than simply a passing comment, however, because it is obvious from Jesus' reply that she *knows*. . .

that He *knows*. . . that she knows, that He can do something about it.

How did Mary know? Had she observed Him performing miracles when He was growing up?

There are a number of stories about Jesus' infancy up to the age of 12 that never made it into our canon of Scripture. The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, for example, describes Jesus as an infant prodigy at school. He supposedly instructed His teachers in "*the unsuspected mysteries of the alphabet*" and astounded His family and playmates with miracles He performed (F.F. Bruce, *Jesus and the Christian Origins Outside the New Testament*, p. 87)

The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* was, however, probably written around 250 A.D., which is a long time after the four New Testament Gospels. And since there is no way of testing the validity of these stories, let's just say that *Mary knew her Son*.

Her statement is straightforward—"They have no more wine."

Jesus' reply, however, has disturbed scholars and lay people for years, because it sounds like Jesus is being rude in response.

To address her as "**Woman**" sounds abrupt and unloving to us. Some translations try to soften that in the English

translation by translating it as “*Dear woman*”, even though the word “dear” is not in the original Greek. The New International Version includes a helpful footnote, “*The Greek for ‘Woman’ does not denote any disrespect.*” It was how one could address a woman politely.

But then to ask His mother why she is involving Him seems even more unloving, even though He couples it with those as yet, mysterious words, “**My hour has not yet come.**”

To understand the intent of Jesus’ words, we need to understand Middle Eastern customs. To address His mother as “Woman” was a title in ordinary usage and not in the least bit disrespectful. (Earl Palmer, p. 29)

On the cross, Jesus used the same word when He turned the care of His beloved mother over to His beloved disciple John, “**Woman, here is your son**” and to John “**Here is your mother**”. (John 19:26-27)

But Jesus’ next words indicate that, as Earl Palmer puts it in his commentary, “*There is an abrupt setting apart of Jesus from his natural relationships*”. Certainly that included His relationship with His mother. “**Why do you involve me?**” Jesus asks. “**My hour has not yet come.**”

Not until Jesus is on the cross will Mary again play any prominent role in His life—when He turns her care over to John.

Jesus' relationship with His mother is altered, yet He does not say "No" to what is obviously a request on her part to protect the reputation of the bridegroom. And not she does not . . . *view*. . . his answer as a "NO". She tells the servants simply to, "**Do whatever he tells you**". And at Jesus' request they fill the pots with water.

The maitre d' samples the wine and is amazed. He commends the bridegroom for saving the finest wine for last. It's a simple story—a wedding, a miracle, a relationship between a mother and her Son. But there is more to the story, and John wants to make sure we don't miss the importance of what has just taken place.

First of all, John tells us this was the first miracle Jesus performed—a sign that demonstrated His power over nature and the elements such as water. Some has said this is Jesus greatest miracle. It was not reviving a dead person, it was not multiplying bread and fish, both of which used what was in front of Him. This miracle is considered greater because it made something that wasn't in front of Him.

This may indeed be His greatest miracle and it is useful for pointing to certain of His other miracles. There will be two more "water signs" to come—when Jesus stills the storm and when Peter tries to walk on water. This is the first. Only a few people are there to see what has happened, but word of it travels fast.

This miracle also stands out because it is performed during a time of great joy. We tend to think of Jesus' ministry in somber tones—opposition, rejection, even death. But in reality His ministry was also marked by times of great joy.

Later on when Jesus sent out the 72 disciples, their mission was so successful they returned with joy, Luke says (Luke 10:17). And Luke also tells us that Jesus was “**full of joy**” (10:21).

Can't you just see Jesus “high fiving” them with “*well done good and faithful servants*”? So on a particular day in a particular village in Galilee, the Lord of all creation began His ministry by bringing joy to the common folk at a wedding. What a wonderful tone to strike at the very beginning of His ministry. Any forgetting of this joy will miss the purpose of His life and ministry. He wants our joy to be abundant.

John also tells us that through the miracle of turning water into wine Jesus “**revealed his glory**”. Isaiah prophesied that one day, through the redeeming work of Christ, all creation would “**shout for joy**” and “**see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God**” (Isaiah 35:1-2). The wedding at Cana was just the beginning of the revelation of Jesus' glory.

The result of this first miracle was that the disciples whom Jesus had brought with Him “**put their faith in him**”. They had already made the decision to follow Him, but no doubt

they were unsure just what that was going to mean. But when they experienced the miracle that brought joy, and when they saw His glory, they were hooked.

You know why I think they put their faith in Him after this miracle. I think it's because they saw that Jesus could enjoy a celebration. He was there to enjoy the uniting of a man and woman in marriage, just the way we would. Everyone loves a party. Any idea we have of God that thinks He doesn't enjoy a good celebration is wrong.

But what about Mary? What can we learn from her in this story about a wedding?

Mary—actually—had several options as to how she would handle the situation.

She could have ignored the fact that the wine was gone. *"It's not my wedding,"* she could have thought. *"I'm not responsible for anything except just showing up—and I've done that."* She could have said, *"Let somebody else worry about the wine. I've got enough to last me right here in this cup."*

Mary's second option was simply to complain that things were not being done right. *"Don't these people know anything about how to plan a wedding?"*

But Mary had a third choice.

She saw a need—and she went straight to the One she knew could meet that need. Instead of wringing her hands in frustration, or blaming the bridegroom for his failure to plan ahead, she simply did what needed to be done. And in doing so she pointed the world to their Savior.

If Mary had stayed in her comfort zone and said nothing to Jesus about the need, Jesus' glory would not have been revealed at this time of joy. If she had simply complained about the way things were, we probably wouldn't have this story in the Bible. The result of her asking her Son for help, the One who could help, we see the disciples' faith was strengthened at this strategic point in their lives.

And so the moral of the story is "*Jesus listened to his mother and so should you.*" Well, not really. This is a simple story: a wedding, a miracle, a relationship and so much joy came from it.