

SERMON NOTES

First Sunday After Christmas

Synaxis Gospel
John 2:1-11

THE FIRST SIGN

INTRODUCTION

The Gospel of John chronicles the life of Jesus Christ with a different emphasis from the other three Gospels. Many things are left out and other events and discourses are included that the other Gospels do not record. John does not begin with the physical birth of our Lord, but instead describes His eternal divinity as the Logos of God (the Word of God). God as the Logos is the Creator of heaven and earth. God as the Logos became a human being and walked among us. His human name is Jesus.

We are given the testimony of John the Baptist that Jesus is also “the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world.” The rest of the Gospel records events and discourses, but especially the ‘signs’ are recorded that the reader “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.”¹

The turning of water into wine was the first of the signs John records that prove the identity of Jesus Christ. John mentions that Jesus performed other miracles and that people began believing in Him because of them, but the specific miracles that he records are: the turning of the water into wine, the curing from a distance of the nobleman’s son, the curing of the lame man at the pool of Bethesda, the feeding of the five thousand, His walking on water, the curing of the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus to life. The last sign was Jesus’ own Resurrection.

For those familiar with the book of Genesis, it is quite apparent that John has patterned at least his Prologue after Moses’ account of the Creation of the world. In describing the first sign, the miracle of the wine at the wedding of Cana, John seems to suggest a certain similarity to the first week of Creation as well. Perhaps this is why he chose it as the first miracle in his record.

SYNTAXIS READING

John 2:1-11

And on the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the wedding.

¹ John 20:31

And when the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."

And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what do I have to do with you? My hour is not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do it."

Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each.

Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the headwaiter." And they took it to him.

And when the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when men have drunk freely, then that which is poorer; you have kept the good wine until now."

This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

NOTES

And on the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and Jesus also was invited, and His disciples, to the wedding.

In chapter one, John has recorded that Nathanael became one of Jesus' disciples. This is the third day after Jesus determined to leave the area of John the Baptist's ministry and go to Galilee. On that same day, Philip brought Nathanael to Jesus. The other disciples, at this time, were John, who is unnamed in this Gospel, and probably his brother James, also unnamed. The others were Andrew, his brother Simon Peter, and Philip. Five of them—Philip, Andrew and Peter, James and John—were from the same town, Bethsaida, or nearby, close to the Sea of Galilee. The journey to Cana took several days.

Nathanael is our beloved Bartholomew, one of the disciples who brought the Gospel to Armenia. Bartholomew, Nathanael's last name, is referred to as Nathanael in John's Gospel and as Bartholomew in the other three Gospels. He was a native of Cana of Galilee.

Jesus may have had family connections to either the bride or the groom. His mother's authority over the servants seems to indicate as much.

Cana was probably the only Cana in Galilee and must have been distinguished from another Cana in another region, perhaps in Syria. It was not far above Capernaum, where Jesus moved from Nazareth.

And when the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine."

A wedding celebration could go on for days, sometimes as long as a week. The failure to have enough wine on hand was a severe embarrassment for the bridegroom. Some have speculated that the presence of Jesus and his disciples may have contributed to the miscalculation of needed supplies.² However, Jesus was invited along with His disciples. Nathanael was a native of Cana, and four others were from nearby. These may have been friends of the host and received their own separate invitations, apart from Jesus.

Why Mary approached Jesus with the problem is another point of speculation. Some have suggested that she had heard of John the Baptist's proclamation concerning Jesus and thought the time was right for Jesus to reveal His identity and power.³ His reply does seem to indicate that He understood her statement to be a request that He do something relative to His mission.

If so, the following reply may be seen as a certain rebuke of her interference in God the Father's own timing for His Son. However that may be, it is true that Jesus no longer was guided by His mother. Now, He was guided solely by His heavenly Father.

And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what do I have to do with you? My hour is not yet come."

Because Jesus addressed her as *Woman* instead of as *Mother*, this reply seems to be harsh by our standards. However, although it may have been a distancing term, it was not a term of disrespect or lack of affection. From the Cross, as Jesus tenderly placed her in the care of His disciple John, He also again addressed her as *Woman*.⁴

Later in His ministry, when Mary, along with other family members, sought special access to Him, Jesus took the opportunity to place her in the same category as others whom He recognized as *Mother*.⁵

The question, "What do I have to do with you?" is literally "What to me and to you?" It comes from a Hebrew expression, *לך ולי למה* meaning "What do we have to do with each other (or "What do we have in common with each other?")!"⁶ It indicates a point of disagreement. Apparently, the point of disagreement was about His *hour*. Jesus knew it had not arrived.

In the Gospel of John, whenever Jesus referred to His *hour* He was speaking of the hour of His passion, His crucifixion, and the circumstances surrounding it.⁷ Until that time, He asked His

² Frederick Louis Godet *Commentary on the Gospel of John, Vol. 1* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, reprint 1969) p. 345

³ *Ibid* p.346

⁴ John 19:26

⁵ Matthew 12:46-50. The title, for Him, was and is no longer based on the unique physical relationship of His birth, but on one's obedience to the Word of God. All who obey God, He recognizes as His "mother and brother and sister."

⁶ Francis Brown *The New Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1979) p. 513b; 553a. See for example, Judges 11:12, 2 Samuel 16:10; 19:23.

⁷ John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 12:27;13:1; 16:32

disciples not to make it known that He was (and is the Christ of God), the promised King. Jesus apparently knew that Mary was suggesting He take the opportunity of the wedding feast to reveal Himself as the Christ, and so He refused that aspect of her request.

His mother said to the servants, “Whatever He says to you, do it.”

Even though she understood the rebuke of her intention, she knew that Jesus would in some way rescue the situation. She stepped gracefully back to her proper bounds and area of competence.

This order to the servants, which they obeyed, indicates Mary’s position in the family of the groom. With them she had legitimate grounds to exercise authority. However, Jesus recognized only the authority of His Father and did only what was His Father’s will.

Now there were six stone waterpots set there for the Jewish custom of purification, containing twenty or thirty gallons each.

The Jews practiced ritual washing of their persons and utensils, before and after eating. This would be common knowledge for John’s Jewish readers, but it was for the sake of his Gentile readers that the point is made.

A point is made as to their number: six. Their capacity is also noted. The lavishness of our Lord’s gift for the bride and groom is indicated by the large capacity of the containers. Altogether, they contained somewhere between 120 to 180 gallons. Today that much wine would fill somewhere between 622 to 933 bottles—far more than the party would consume and would be a source of wealth for the future.⁸

If John is subtly alluding to the Creation story, the number six was the day of the creation of Adam and Eve, and also the day of their wedding. Everything that was created was ultimately made from the primordial waters (in six days). The Creation was also ultimately—and extravagantly—for the benefit of the original bridal pair.

Jesus said to them, “Fill the waterpots with water.” And they filled them up to the brim.

The guests no doubt had depleted the contents of the water pots. They needed to be refilled with water. This action guaranteed that the servants would know that the water pots were filled with plain water. There was no more room in the water pots for anything else—just water.

**And He said to them, “Draw some out now, and take it to the headwaiter.”
And they took it to him.**

Jesus did not verbally command the water to become wine, but He performed the miracle. John has already told us in chapter one that Jesus is the Word of God that accomplished all that God spoke “in the beginning.” He was God functioning as the Creator, and once again at this wedding He created lavishly from water and did it instantly.

If God could create instantly wine that had all the qualities of aged wine, and produce wine that would normally take years and years to produce from a grape seed, and that He should do this from only water (not even from a grape seed), why should we be astonished at the account of Genesis 1?

And when the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water

⁸ Today a wine cellar that contained that many bottles of the finest wine in the world would be quite valuable. Dom. Romane Conti 1997 sells consistently for over \$1,500 per bottle.

knew), the headwaiter called the bridegroom, and said to him, “Every man serves the good wine first, and when men have drunk freely, then that which is poorer; you have kept the good wine until now.”

The headwaiter, or the governor of the feast, was in charge of what was served at the party. Therefore, he tasted it before he allowed it to be served. He was amazed at the excellent quality of the wine, which the servants brought to him, and he supposed that the bridegroom had reserved it until the poorer wine was finished. But the servants knew the truth.

Normally, after people are more or less inebriated, their ability to judge the quality of wine is diminished, and so the custom was to serve the best wine first. Hardly anyone, then, was aware that the wine being served was so superior.

This beginning of His signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

The glory of our Lord is the revelation of His identity and character. In John 1:1-3, the identity of the One called Jesus had been stated. He is the Creator God. Now, His first miracle proves it. “The single feature that is most characteristic of science is its reproducibility.” At the wedding of Cana, the Creator reproduced, albeit on a much smaller scale, His act of creation from water.

The character of the Sovereign Creator was displayed as well. What He creates is good. Moreover, what He creates is abundantly lavish for the sake of those He loves.

The disciples were convinced that Jesus was the Christ of God., the King promised by God through the prophets.

APPLICATION

Everyone who attends an Armenian wedding is struck by the central ceremony, the crowning of the bride and groom as king and queen of their newly created kingdom, the kingdom of their own family. As their crowned foreheads bend and meet, a symbol of the Cross is held spanning and uniting both bowed heads. The cross symbolizes that Christ has created them and brought them together. Now, He sanctifies them, setting them apart for each other alone, and He blesses them. In bowing to Him, they bow to each other. He has bestowed on them an abundantly lavish gift, the gift of His love. God declares the marriage of the man and the woman, the crown of all of His other good creation, “very good.”

In our reading for today, the Apostle John has set forth the beginning of the miracles, which God in His human incarnation preformed. In the details he chooses to relate of the miracle, John hints at the correspondence of the miracle to the original miracle of Creation. Both the wine for the wedding and the fullness of the original creation were made simply from water at the will of the Creator. Both were made lavishly abundant for the bridal pair—Adam and Eve in the original act, and again, for this newly-wed couple. The gift is bounded by six measures of time in the first instance, and by six measures of space in this wedding: six days, six water pots.

There is another hint in the account of this miracle. The wine of joy for the bride and groom is a symbol of lavish love, the love of God for us all. The wine is not cheap, it is the finest of all, and it symbolizes the death of Christ on the Cross, which produced the great joy of our salvation. That hour of His sacrifice was the first thought, it seems, that entered the mind of our Lord when He was told, “They have no wine.” He responded, “My hour (of sacrifice) is not yet come.” His death would meet all the needs of a guilty humanity; His death would supply all that is required for the joyful restoration of His lost mankind to Himself and to each other in love.

The glory of God is the revelation of His character. Love beyond measure characterizes our God. This love, whose object is the other, whose self sacrifice is for the good of the other, was fully displayed on the Cross. Righteous justice characterizes our God as well. This characteristic was also fully displayed on the Cross. The penalty for the sins of the sinners was fully and completely paid by His death. His justice required that which His love gladly paid. His death has, once again, made us the loving kings and queens He originally intended—if we accept this wonderful gift in humble submission to Him.

As we attend weddings, often the priest reminds us of Jesus’ presence at the wedding of Cana—evidence of the sanctity of marriage. Let us also remember, as we watch the cross held against the bowed heads of the bride and groom, the cost to our God, which it symbolizes. The glorious wine of our salvation cost our God the death of Jesus Christ. It was a gift of ultimate love that should cause us all to fall at His feet in eternal thankfulness and joy in His Presence. May God help us to remember and to celebrate His matchless love.