

To spend our time arguing over whether we believe in the miracle at the wedding in Cana is to miss the whole point of the story. I was in a minister's study group. We met once a month – discusses the lectionary passages for the month. It was our task to read all of them and then we were assigned one Sunday of the month to choose a text for that day and to work on what we thought it said – and work on some ways one might approach the sermon from that text. I enjoyed the group and we were diverse in our theology which made for helpful discussion. I did discover, that even though I was the "liberal" member of the group, I was the only who preached on the miracles. The rest of the group thought it was a bad tactic, unwise psychology, to choose a text likely to cause some people in the congregation to just close their mind to the sermon because of the insecure foundation of the miracle story.

John tries to let the light of the gospel fall upon the miracle stories. He gathers around them the central teachings of Jesus. There is really no evidence to say John doesn't accept the miracles as literal and physical facts – but John does not lay the main stress on the miracle. John uses the miracle stories as evidence of the comforting power and work of God among people.

That 5000 had a meal is no doubt to John, and they were hungry and needed a meal. But his emphasis is that Christ can feed hungry and needy people – more than just food. The spirit of God can bring them life – and is as important as a meal. John is sure that Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, but the miracle was that the power of God can reach those long dead in sin, reach those dead in meaning in their life – and can startle them into newness of life.

In our text today, Jesus enters into people's troubles. The water turned to wine is a very real relief for the host of the wedding. This wedding story reminds me of our gathering for the Chief's crawl in Bundu, South Africa. We, peace corps volunteers, were invited to the village to be welcomed by the chief and the whole village. It was an important day for the village. Probably because it meant that everyone in the village would have a good meal that day. There were four or five of these wash pots cooking some kind of meat, stew dish. I am not sure what was being cooked, but there was plenty of food, including meat, bread and drink for all.

It would not have been the time to run out of food. And on that day, there was food left over, just like the wine at the wedding in Cana.

Things can go wrong at a wedding. The general understanding of those who work with weddings a lot is not if something will go wrong, but will it be big or little. It could be something as little as a groomsman not trying on his tux and getting dressed for the wedding discovers that pants are 6 inches too short. Or, the candle lighter can just light all the candles, including the unity candle. Or it could be that the flowers do not arrive or the caterer does not bring the cake. I remember a wedding at Arlington where a huge dog decided to join the wedding and decided to put his paws on the brides dress as she was making her entrance. I remember when the 4 year old ring bearer dropped the wedding rings on the marble altar area at Canterbury.

I know several frightening stories, but I will refrain from them because Miriam and Barrett are getting married in March and I want them to believe everything will go fine. And it will – just ask Nancy and Mary who had daughters who got married here during this past year.

One important fact about our lesson today is that Jesus was at the wedding. I don't know if he was there because of his family, but he was present. I think it means he wanted to be there. He was not out of his element.

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He was not afraid he would not fit in or that he would make the other people uncomfortable. John the Baptizer, on the other hand would have made everyone uncomfortable. But Jesus was a part of the community celebrating a wedding. Sometimes we seem to be afraid to smile, to laugh, to celebrate as we live out the Christian Faith. Much of life is joyful and needs to be celebrated. We do not celebrate enough.

Today we issue wedding invitations that give the date, time, place of the wedding and the reception and usually there is a card or phone number asking to confirm the attendance at the wedding. In our text today, that is not how people were invited to a wedding. It probably started a month or so early, but by word of mouth and from neighbor to neighbor, people were invited to a wedding during a certain week. So the host would have to have to provide a lot of food for guests who came early or who stayed an extra day. Nazareth is a good three days journey away from Cana. We don't know how long the wedding has been going on, but there is a problem. The host is running out of wine. Did Mary notice the whispering and growing embarrassment? To run out of wine would be a shameful miscalculation of the host. Mary turns to Jesus to fix the problem. It is a strange fact that no one in his home thought of Jesus as especially religious. None of his boyhood friends joined his movement or ever took it seriously. James was thought to be the devout one in the family.

Yet Jesus is the one Mary turned to when the host family needed help. Religion that does not reach into our home life is gravely suspect.

How do we sum up the teaching found in our text today? What does our text say about following Jesus? I would say the word to use is helpfulness.

We may underestimate that very point in our life. I have a friend who spent time with Adam Thrash's family at his capital murder trial in Bessemer this week. Adam was found guilty and sentenced to life without parole.

But his parents needed someone to sit with them in the courtroom and be present with them in a very difficult time in their life. Helpfulness – sometimes it is not turning water into wine, sometimes it is just being present.

When I consider the parable of the Last Judgment, I see in it this very emphasis of John in our lesson for today – helpfulness to those in need.

I was hungry and you brought food, I was thirsty and you brought water,

I was naked and you brought clothes, I was lonely and you visited.

We can argue about the turning water into wine- but we can't fail to miss the point of the wedding in Cana of Galilee. We are called to be helpful.

We are called to reach out to those about us who need the caring presence of God in their lives.