



Let's review: In Mark, Jesus starts his ministry with an exorcism; in Matthew, it is the Sermon on the Mount; in Luke, by teaching in the synagogue. In John, Jesus' ministry begins with a miracle: changing water into wine.

In the Johannine Gospel, Jesus heals the sick, feeds 5000; walks on water, gives sight to a man born blind, and raises Lazarus from the dead. Why would his first sign be making wine for a wedding celebration? Maybe...because his mother told him to. <>

John is a complex work "in the beginning" (pun intended) right through to the end. <> On one level, this story is about water and wine; a miracle...and Jesus emergence as a powerful leader; but it's not only about those things. There's no Messianic Secret in John: from the start, Jesus is aware of his identity as the human manifestation of the Divine. That frames all of what happens to and through Jesus in John's portrait.

At its core, this is a story about **change** – and the awesome potential it reveals; and the amazing gifts it brings.

A wedding itself signals change. It's the beginning of a new life for people joined in faith, hope, and love. It acknowledges that a new household is being formed. It's about making a commitment, a covenant that one intends to be lifelong. Both parties give and both parties gain. It's also a paradigm for the relationship of believers ( Ray Brown's Community of the Beloved Disciple) with the Christ.

We know a fair bit about weddings in ancient Israel. The Mishnah (oral tradition set in writing about AD 200) says that a wedding took place on a Wednesday if the bride was a virgin and on Thursday if she was a widow. <> The groom and his friends made their way to the bride's father's house, often at night, in a spectacular torchlight procession. The wedding activities might last a week. <>

So Jesus is at a wedding. Well into the festivities, **his mother** (she's **never** called Mary in this gospel) realizes there's no wine left - and either there's no money to buy more or none is available. That was going to ruin the party.

Wine – fruit of the vine - was a symbol of bounty and blessing so, 'They have no wine,' offers another layer to the story – we get to ask: what happens when the experience/ evidence of God's blessing seems to have run out? [Remember that these people live in an occupied land with foreign governors and compromised leaders.]

Jesus' mother steps in by bringing the wine-shortage to his attention. She is so quick to get involved that the couple being married could be very close friends or **relatives** – maybe the bride is one of Jesus' sisters.

Since Jesus has not yet performed a **public** 'sign', it's hard to say that his mother expects one, but she certainly expects Jesus to do something. And when she directs the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them, they seem willing to do so.

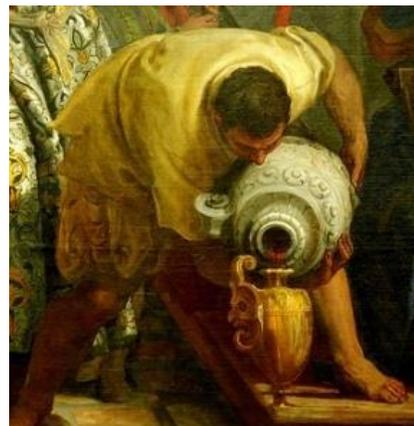
Jesus doesn't seem so keen. His response defines, perhaps redefines, his relationship to his mother. Jesus does not call her "Mary," or "mother," – just "woman." It's the same term uses when he speaks to her from the cross.

In this exchange, he gives the 1<sup>st</sup> century equivalent of 'and this is my problem because...'. But then, Jesus **does** act – telling the servants to fill each of the six water jugs to the brim.

That would have seemed very odd to them but they fill the jars with water. This is noteworthy for two reasons. First, the jugs were for washing water, not drinking water! Second, they held about 200 gallons.

When that's done, Jesus instructs the servants to draw out some of the "**water**" to serve it to the steward – who announces that it is the best wine of the feast.

While it's a public event, this is a very quiet sign. Only Jesus' mother, a few disciples and servants know where this wine came from. In the early church there was a lot of discussion about where Jesus came from. Maybe that's another layer in this text.



Sometimes Jesus explains the signs he performs but not here. The text does say that in this miracle, he **"revealed his glory"** (v. 11b) **"and his disciples believed in him."**

***That is the point of the story*** (Brown). At the end of the gospel, the writer explains that the **purpose of this entire work** is "that **you** may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name". First, a close-knit group believes; then the movement grows. <>

This is a story about change: transformation made visible by abundance, hospitality, and generosity overflowing 'earthen vessels' In that miracle, the benefit isn't just for the bride and groom, their families, or their guests alone. It serves a much bigger purpose.

In the epistle Paul wrote: "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." **For the common good**...that resonates deeply with me.

When we contribute to the common good, we benefit! Sharing God's gifts/our resources with others is a real privilege. It invites us into the joy of generosity - and helping others gives our lives meaning!

Paul says that everything valuable that happens in the faith community happens through the power of the Spirit and that every gift points to God's transformative action in the midst of human experience. ← that's a mouthful!

Paul wrote to the Corinthians in part because some people felt their gifts/abilities were superior to others. That happens today too. It's easy to feel superior if you think you're smarter, stronger, richer, more beautiful than others. It also can be easier **to see** someone else's gifts than it is to see your own – and to see the impact they make!

It's a real challenge and a real mark of maturity - to set aside entitlement and envy – and work for the common good – with a variety of gifts, loads of different ways that people serve and celebrate the Divine and each other.



The body of Christ is miraculously complex, with billions of members, in countless settings, with hundreds of languages, unique cultures, norms, and expressions of faith...who have come to believe that Jesus' example is transformative – for us.

Life in that body and Spirit invites us, allows us, compels us to be transformed and to become agents of transformation ourselves. We have seen – are seeing – will see remarkable signs: abundance and blessing pouring out "the best stuff" from what could have been the wash-water of our lives.

That's awesome! We celebrate God-with-us at work for the common good - in this congregation, in this community, and in this world. In this Epiphany season, may we see signs, claim gifts, share grace, find ourselves transformed...and may our joy be complete. Amen.