

First Sunday of Lent - February 22, 2026

Video Online Bible Study with Rev. Gary E. Mathiesen

“Tell Me Something Good”

~ Grounding Ourselves in the Good News of Lent ~ “The Good News Is ... So Good It Catches Us By Surprise”

John 2:1-11 (Matthew 13:31-32)

NOTES ON THE TEXT - JOHN 2:1-11(12) - “THE WEDDING BANQUET AT CANA”

~ THE PRELIMINARIES ~

☞ v. 11 “*This, the first of [Jesus’] miraculous signs ...*”

* John always refers to Jesus’ miracles as “signs”: a word that emphasizes the significance of the ACTION rather than marvel itself. John uses these “signs” as a way to make a point.

* John records seven (a number of completeness/perfection) “signs” in the body of his gospel account: three healings; three of power over nature; and one raising of the dead (the epilogue of John’s gospel contains the catching of a large number of fish by the disciples):

- Healing: The official’s son at Capernaum (4:46-54)

- Nature: Water turned to wine (2:1-11) - Resurrection: Lazarus from the dead (11:1-44)

- Healing: The sick man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-9)

- Nature: Feeding of the 5,000 (6:6-13)

- Healing: A man born blind (9:1-7)

- Nature: Walking on water (6:19-21)

~ THE SETTING ~

☞ vv. 1a “... *a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee ...*” John starts his gospel at a party. John’s gospel doesn’t open Jesus’ ministry with a baptism and temptation story (per Matthew, Mark & Luke); instead, John begins Jesus’ ministry with - surprise! - a wedding miracle! John does not begin Jesus’ ministry with a healing (many people healed of various diseases, seizures, exorcisms and paralysis in Mtt 4:23; a man with leprosy in Mk 1:40 & Lk 5:12). The good news begins - in John - with joy and celebration. Why?

☞ vv. 1b-2 ... *Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.*” Why are Jesus and his newly appointed disciples hanging out at a wedding? Is this a family affair? Does Jesus attend this wedding as a favor to his mother before leaving Galilee for Capernaum? We do not know much about how weddings were celebrated in the time of Jesus but they would have included a wider community of people in Cana and would have lasted for a few days.

~ THE PROBLEM !!! ~

☞ v. 3 “*When the wine was gone ...*” There is a secretive nature to the story as it appears that only a few people knew the wine was gone before the party was over: primarily Jesus’ mother, Mary, who drew this to the attention of Jesus (and the disciples?) and the servants who were nearby to do as Jesus ordered. Also - outside of Jesus - it is only the servants who know what happened to the empty water jars (It is implied that Mary knows Jesus will do something about the lack of wine). How does this miracle story reflect upon the beginning of Jesus’ ministry? Playful? Comedic? Secretive?

☞ v. 3a “*When the wine was gone ...*” Running out of wine could be seen as a major social faux pas, reflecting poorly on the host of the party and the wedded couple’s families. Who would have been blamed or punished for the wine running out?

~ **THE RESPONSE** ~

☞ vv. 3b-5 “*Jesus’ mother said to him, ‘They have no more wine.’ ‘Dear woman, why do you involve me? My time has not yet come.’ His mother [turns] and says to the servants ‘Do whatever he tells you.’*” [Lots of questions here!]

- * How do we interpret this banter between mother and son? Playful? Serious? Sense of obligation to help out with a problem?
- * What is Mary’s expectation of Jesus? Does she expect Jesus to turn water to wine? Jesus will figure something out!
- * Why is Jesus hesitant? [The term “*dear woman*” is a term of familiarity/closeness ... some might translate this as “Mom!”] Jesus is not slapping Mary down, but does seem to suggest that this is not any of Jesus’ (or his mom’s) business.
- * Does Mary “force” Jesus’ hand in doing something miraculous? Mothers had a strong hold over their sons!

☞ v. 6 “*Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing ... each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.*” Under Mosaic Law, the water jars were used for ritual cleansing before the meal. Why does Jesus use these vessels for a miracle? Are these jars significant or were they the most convenient means for providing wine?

☞ vv. 6-7 “*Fill the jars with water.*” The sole purpose of this miracle is to keep the celebration going! Jesus tells the wedding servants to fill six stone water jars, each holding between 20-30 gallons. This is our equivalent of over 600-900 750 mL bottles of high quality wine!! That’s about 50-75 cases of wine (12 bottles per box) at a cost of about \$250-500 per case for a total of about \$12,000-\$37,500 for all cases of wine. The miracle seems lavish and unnecessary! Who benefits from this miracle?

☞ v. 8 “*‘Now draw some [wine] out [of the water jars] and take it to the master of the banquet.’ They did so ...*” Jesus exits the narrative at this point. Jesus is no longer the focal point of this miracle! The story pivots away from the astonishing miracle to the point John (as the writer) wants to make about this wedding miracle.

~ **THE POINT OF THE “SIGN”** ~

☞ vv. 9-10c “*... but you have saved the best till now.*” We come to the point of the miracle: The master of the banquet, upon tasting the wine Jesus provided (and who did NOT know the wine had run out; who did not know how much wine Jesus provided; and who had NO knowledge of what Jesus had just done by changing water into wine), was impressed that the bridegroom (the host of the party) had saved the best wine for last ... something that was not done. Perhaps this is the theme of John’s gospel: out of scarcity when all seems lost, the best has come ... and - surprise! - it has come in a way not expected ... and it comes in abundance!

~ **THE EPILOGUE** ~

☞ v. 12 “*After this, [Jesus] went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples for a few days.*” Rather anti-climactic transition from Jesus’ first miracle. Jesus moves on to the north side of the Sea of Galilee.

NOTES ON THE TEXT ~ MATTHEW 13:31-32 ~ “THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED”:

☞ v. “... *the smallest of all seeds* ...” unassuming in size and expectation [A mustard seed called the black mustard in Judea could grow into a large tree-like shrub to a height of as much as six feet high.]. The mustard seed may be small to the eye and have inconspicuous beginnings, but the seed can yield surprising results. Many of Jesus’ listeners would have considered the mustard plant to be a weed. But - surprise! - the mustard seed becomes a plant that is beneficial to other creatures.

~ OBSERVATIONS ~

Jesus does NOT get credit for the miracle (no crowds/individuals giving Jesus accolades). Few people know what happened. The bridegroom gets the credit for saving the best for last and avoiding a major embarrassment in front of his family and guests.

The GOOD NEWS is a SURPRISE:

- * It does not come in a manner - at a time - in a way as one might EXPECT (sometimes it does). The Bible is FULL of surprises!
- * It comes in ABUNDANCE - “There’s still more to come.”
- * It comes only as the BEST

The Prophets expected/anticipated redemption (“good news”). Read Isaiah 35:1-2 (3-10):

“The desert and parched land [empty wine caskets] will be glad; the wilderness [no more wine] will rejoice and blossom. Like crocus, it will burst into bloom [like 120-180 gallons of choice wine]; it will rejoice greatly [you have saved the best till now] and shout for joy.”

QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION ...

1. When have you witnessed something flourishing unexpectedly?
2. Where/When have you experienced a surprising good by God?
3. Why do you think John highlighted this miracle as a start to Jesus’ ministry (instead of the temptation and healing stories of Mtt, Mk & Lk)?
4. What does this story say about the good news of Jesus according to John?
5. Is this miracle story playful? Sarcastic? Serious? Secretive? Or something else?
6. Who benefits from this miracle? The host of the party? The wedded couples families? The servants? Mary? Jesus (his reputation)?
7. Is there a part of you that questions the purpose of this miracle as lavish and unnecessary?

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