

## **“CLEANSED AND READY TO FEAST”**

**John 2:1-11**

Our Gospel this morning, Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, includes so many interesting teachings, that to uncover them all would take all day, but I believe there's a central message that shines with Epiphany brightness.

Jesus is heading to a wedding feast in Cana, a town not far from His childhood home of Nazareth or His current base of operation in Capernaum. How exactly he received the invitation isn't told us, but perhaps His mother, Mary, had a connection with the family. So, there they are: Mary, Jesus, and a group of His disciples—perhaps 5 or 6 at this point in time, and they're ready to feast!

It's worth noting that Jesus' presence at this wedding highlights the sacredness of marriage. It's as if He's personally blessing the union, just as He blesses Christian marriages today. But there is much more in this text to consider.

Consider Jesus' mother, Mary. She discovers that the celebration, which in those days could have lasted for as long as a week, is facing a serious problem: they've run out of wine! This would have been a major embarrassment for this young couple. So, Mary turns to her son, Jesus... and while she doesn't specifically ask, clearly behind her observation that the wine had run out, is the expectation that Jesus will come to the rescue.

Mary, understands her son's divine power, and trusts His perfectly. She knows He's capable of extraordinary things. So, she tells the servants, "Do whatever He tells you." This simple command speaks volumes about her faith. It's a powerful testament to her trust in Jesus. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we all had Mary's unwavering faith, ready to "do whatever He says?"

Jesus addresses the shortage, and – miraculously – provides wine for the celebration, suggests that Jesus doesn't condemn the moderate enjoyment of wine. After all, Psalm 104 reminds us that the Lord "gives wine to gladden the heart of man." This, by the way, is one of the reasons why grape juice isn't used in our weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper. First of all, because Jesus used wine, but also because grape juice doesn't have that "gladdening quality" that wine does making it unsuitable for such a joyful feast. Of course, wine, like many other good gifts from our Creator, is meant to be enjoyed responsibly, not abused.

Jesus transforms the water into wine, solving the crisis and demonstrating power from heaven. He's not just a prophet; He's the very Son of God, the Word made flesh, as John's Gospel proclaims. This eternal Son, the Second Person of the Trinity, existed with God from the beginning, and through His, all things were created. Here, we witness the Creator Himself exercising His divine power, turning water into wine.

But the true depth of this story lies in the details. Notice from where the water comes: "Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons." John could have just mentioned "large water jars," but he provides these specific details: six jars, each holding a significant amount of water—20 to 30 gallons. And Jesus instructs the servants to "fill them to the brim." This emphasis on abundance speaks volumes too. Jesus' gifts overflow; they are always more than we can anticipate or imagine. His grace is rich, overflowing, and always abundant.

John also notes that these were jars "for the Jewish rites of purification." The Jews meticulously observed rituals of purification, often going beyond the requirements of God's Law.

They practiced numerous washings to achieve ritual cleanliness. These six stone jars, specifically designed for purification rituals, highlight the contrast between these man-made attempts at cleansing and the true spiritual cleansing offered by Jesus.

These jars, designed for ritual purification, become vessels of something completely new. Jesus replaces the water of purification with the “new wine” of His grace. The old covenant, with its emphasis on external rituals, is now fulfilled. Jesus, the author of the new covenant, offers a deeper, more transformative purification: a spiritual cleansing from sin. He fulfills the promises of the old covenant—“fills them to the brim,” bringing about a new era of grace.

This, my brothers and sisters, is the true purification: the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He offers not mere ritual washings, but the ultimate cleansing: the shedding of His own blood for our forgiveness. Through His death on the cross, Jesus provides the ultimate purification, washing away our sins and restoring us to right relationship with God.

At Cana, Jesus declares, “My hour has not yet come.” This “hour”—the time of His crucifixion—is the ultimate purpose of His mission. As He later states, “For this purpose I have come to this hour.” Jesus will be “lifted up” on the cross, and through this act of sacrificial love, He will draw all people to himself. Cana, with its foreshadowing of abundant grace, serves as a sign pointing towards the cross, where Jesus will offer the ultimate purification, an overflowing abundance of grace through the shedding of His holy blood.

My brothers and sisters, the weight of our sins can be overwhelming. We can’t cleanse ourselves through our own efforts. The Pharisees, with their painstaking rituals ultimately failed to find true purification. As John writes, “The blood of Jesus, God’s Son, cleanses us from all sin.” ONLY His blood has the power to do that.

We must confess our shortcomings honestly. “If we pretend to be without sin, we deceive ourselves”, John tells us in his first epistle. But there is hope! Confess your sins to God, because He is a gracious and merciful God who “forgives our sins and cleanses us from all unrighteousness.”

And what’s the fruit of this cleansing, this forgiveness, this life-giving grace? Joy! Abundant, overflowing joy! And where on earth do we experience the pinnacle of human joy and celebration? At a wedding! Two lives are united, promising a future filled with love and the potential for new life! Weddings are joyous occasions, filled with laughter, feasting, and the sharing of good wine. It’s no wonder that Jesus frequently compares the Kingdom of Heaven to a wedding feast – a place of unending joy and celebration.

Jesus intentionally performs this miracle at a wedding! It’s a powerful sign: demonstrating the abundant life and joy that flow from His death and resurrection. Notice John’s detail at the beginning of our Gospel this morning: “On the THIRD DAY there was a wedding at Cana.” This echoes the resurrection, which also occurred on the third day. This celebration foreshadows the ultimate celebration – the resurrection of Christ and the eternal joy that awaits us. Death can’t extinguish this life; it is a gift that endures forever.

You’re invited to the ultimate celebration: the wedding feast of the Lamb in His Kingdom, a banquet that will last for eternity. This is not a fleeting party; it’s an unending celebration, and Jesus saves the very best for last – an abundance of joy and life beyond our wildest imaginations. This gift is freely offered, overflowing and immeasurable. In the name of Jesus, Amen.