



# Good Shepherd Lutheran Church

Watertown, WI

## “Water to Wine”

Rev. David K. Groth

*1” On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. 3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” 4 And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” 5 His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” 6 Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. 8 And he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast.” So they took it. 9 When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” 11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him. “*

**John 2:1-11**

**January 20, 2013**

### **Collect of the Day**

Almighty and everlasting God, who governs all things in heaven and on earth, mercifully hear the prayers of Your people and grant us Your peace through all our days; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

If you had been with our family during our recent trip to Spain, this is one of the refrains you would have heard. “Thank you, Good Shepherd!” That is, your extraordinary and surprising gift at Christmas enabled us to see and do things that we would not have otherwise done. Eating lunch at a very nice restaurant in Ronda. “Thank you, Good Shepherd!” Gail said at the table following the prayer. Paying the fees to enter a myriad of museums and cathedrals, and even two ancient synagogues. “Thank you, Good Shepherd!” And one we will never forget, having another nice meal on a sunny balcony in the southern mountains. It was in a small village called Pampaneira, the square houses, bright white, clinging to one another and clinging to the side of the mountain, red geraniums hanging in baskets against those walls white as snow.

We had lunch outside in the sun. I was bit by a cat (different story for a different sermon), and then we walked around in this pristine mountain village. In a small shop, a sort of general goods store, there were three enormous wooden barrels, each with a different wine that came from the grapes that were growing on the narrow terraces that had been carved out of the side of the mountain. The wine was being sold for about three Euros for a two liter minimum. While getting their daily baguettes, villagers would also come in with their two liter ceramic jugs and fill them up. The owner (an elderly woman) encouraged me to try some and gave me a cup. I opened and closed the spigot as fast as I could because a small quantity seemed right when only taste testing. But the owner was miffed that I should take so little, and through Stephanie, our interpreter, told me to have

more. So, I did. It was sweet and young and tasted of the barrel . . . and I bought a jug. Thank you Good Shepherd!

Wine over there takes on a different role than it does here. They don't serve a lot of milk or beer . . . it's water and wine at meals, and the wine is cheap and it's good and it's ubiquitous. It is served to children. It's served at lunch, even in the nursing homes. It's the main thing served at every formal occasion. It's the main thing served at weddings.

And so it was 2,000 years ago, on the other side of the Mediterranean. In first-century Palestine, there was no honeymoon, but the wedding celebration went on for days. People must have dropped in for a while, left to attend to business, get some sleep, and then returned for more eating and drinking, singing and storytelling and celebrating.

At this particular wedding, disaster strikes. They've run out of wine. This was not in Wisconsin crowd; there's no beer or brandy anywhere. The groom's family is embarrassed, the mother of the bride is in tears, the guests are disappointed. Mary notices all this and says to her son, "You know, it would be nice if you would do something about this."

He, in turn, is short with her, distances himself from her. Curiously he calls her "woman" (not mom or mother), and says in effect, "this is none of my business nor yours for that matter. Besides, my time for doing such things has not yet come." But Mary knows her son, knows he'll come around, knows that he sometimes cannot help himself, cannot help but fix that which is broken and in pieces. Maybe that comes in part from his background in carpentry; he's a fixer. So Mary says to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Jesus considers options. There are six huge stone water containers at the door of the house. They are there for ritual washing of hands. "Fill them with water," he says to the servants, and they do . . . to the brim, about thirty gallons each. "Take some to the steward" he says. You can imagine their lack of enthusiasm. They know it's water because they

just filled them with water. But they're servants and so they do as told and take out a ladleful of water and hand it to the steward. He takes a sip and is shocked. It's wine. And as the wine swirls around his tongue and he breathes in and swallows, he tastes not any old wine, but a very fine wine, a lot better than the cheap stuff they had been serving. And there's a lot of it now, about 150 or 160 gallons worth. This wedding celebration will eventually come to an end, but it will not be for lack of good wine.

It was his first miracle, and still today it makes some Christians uncomfortable. "It wasn't really wine" they say. "It was unfermented grape juice." But the Greek says wine. And moreover, just think about the dynamics. Think about your dads and your uncles and aunts, cousins. Can you picture them sitting around for days, telling stories and singing songs and playing Sheepshead all the while sipping Welch's grape juice? Of course it was wine!

Others are scandalized not by the fact that it was wine, but by the miracle of the story. It's an assault to their reason and senses. But I love what Wendell Berry has to say: "Whoever really has considered the lilies of the field or the birds of the air and pondered the improbability of their existence will hardly balk at the turning of water into wine which was, after all, a very small miracle. We forget the greater and still continuing miracle by which water (with soil and sunlight) is turned into grapes."

And I love what C.S. Lewis has to say: "Every year, as part of the natural order, God makes wine. God does so by creating [a plant] that can turn water, soil and sunlight, into a juice which will, under proper conditions, become wine. God is constantly turning water into wine. The miracle at Cana consists in a short cut" (Miracles, p. 141). That's all. Not a big deal. God's ordinary way of making wine is through a lengthy, controlled, predictable process. God's extraordinary way of making wine happened just once, at a wedding in Galilee.

But not everyone likes this first miracle of Jesus. And if you think about it, their argument is with grace. He's

giving too much (about a 150 gallons) of a fine wine to people who have done nothing to deserve it and have probably already had enough. They're argument is with grace. The Lord's generosity . . . whether at Cana or the Baptismal font or at this altar or at the gates of heaven, the Lord's generosity and grace always have the scent of scandal nearby. In fact, if you are not shocked, appalled even by the generosity and unconditional nature of grace, how absolutely free it is, how there's nothing whatsoever you can do to earn it, and how there's nothing whatsoever someone else has done that would disqualify him from it . . . if you are not shocked by grace, even appalled by it, then it's probably not grace that we're talking about. It's something else, some other thing, some other man-made notion of a religion based on works and not on grace . . . a quid pro quo religion, this for that, a more or less equal exchange. You give him your works. God gives you his salvation. You make a decision for Christ and he rewards you with heaven. But that's not grace; that's works.

Grace is a different kind of exchange, a different kind of this for that, and the scales are way out of balance. It works like this: we give him our sin. He gives us his righteousness. We give him our crud . . . the filth of our thoughts and words and deeds; he gives us his innocence and purity, the blood of the lamb without blemish or fault. We give him our well-earned death as the wages of sin, and are rewarded with eternal life, free and unearned. In matters of the Christian faith, that's the only kind of exchange worth talking about.

So, not everyone likes this first miracle of Jesus because he's giving too much of a good thing to people who don't deserve it. Soren Kierkegaard said somewhere that while Jesus turned water into wine his people seem determined to turn it back into water again.

And notice how Jesus brings this grace into a very human occasion. While wedding customs differ from culture to culture, one thing they all have in common is a family reunion and a whole lot of human drama. There are relatives

who haven't seen each other in a long time, and some of them prefer it that way. There are two extended families getting to know each other, some happily and others not so much. In every family there are eccentric aunts and difficult uncles, the old ones resting and gossiping in the caterer's flimsy folding chairs, maybe complaining about the young ones running around, driving everyone crazy. A wedding is a messy business, a very human occasion fraught with lots of intense emotions and the high probability of problems. In fact, one of the things pastors like to do when we get together is regale one another with wedding stories, like when the teenage son of the groom threw up just before the vows. As a pastor, what would you do? Stop everything and wait for someone to find a towel? Or pretend that it didn't happen and that nasty puddle isn't really there? Weddings are a messy business, full of human drama, with people looking at one another lustfully, or suspiciously, even angrily. And at Cana, Jesus brought his wonderful grace right into the middle of all that human drama.

The dearth of wine at a wedding is a small problem in the grand scheme of things, isn't it? They would have been okay. No one ever died for lack of wine at a wedding. But the Lord understands human drama, and not even this is too petty for his concern and compassion. He has this old habit of fixing things that are broken and so he blesses this wedding with some 150 gallons of very fine wine. That's grace. That's generosity. And that's the only way you and I (or anyone else for that matter) gets into the kingdom of heaven, by his grace and generosity.

In verse 11, John calls it a sign, which begs the question: A sign of what? It's a sign of what he's come to bring to your life and mine. He's come not just to fix broken weddings, but to fix broken marriages, and broken bodies, and broken relationships with one another and with him. He's come to fix lives that are broken and in pieces. And he does it today and will do that also on the last day with that same generosity and grace that he exhibited in his first miracle, two thousand years ago, at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Amen.



**GOOD SHEPHERD LUTHERAN CHURCH**

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