



Jan. 17, 2016 Jn. 2: 2-12

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Stone, Naomi. [Pouring Love](#)

Rolheiser, Fr. Ron. [Seize the Moment](#)

[Monastery Sunday Homilies](#) (right click & open)

[Wedding at Cana](#) and [another](#)

ENTERING THE SCENE:

In Jesus' day there was a "science" called numerology. This is the belief that certain numbers indicate qualities over and above quantities. Three signaled completion. Thirty would share that same feeling. Six implied incompleteness. So we have three days, thirty years and six jars. Reading between the lines we are sensing that John invites us to know, maybe even before Jesus appeared to know, that his time has indeed come. In introducing 6 jars we find John implying that Jesus will bring to completion the beginning of salvation history: the heavenly banquet so often spoken of in his Hebrew scriptures. Now we, like the servants who were the only ones who knew what really happened that day, carry this "secret" in our hearts. Did you ever wonder what they did with this "inside knowledge"? What are you doing with it today?

Jn. 2:1-12

1 On the **third day** a wedding took place at **Cana** in Galilee. Jesus' **mother** was there, 2 and Jesus and his **disciples** had also been invited to the **wedding**. 3 When the **wine** was gone, Jesus' **mother** said to him, "They have no more **wine**." 4 Dear **woman**, why do you **involve** me?" Jesus replied. "My **time** has not yet come." 5 His **mother** said to the **servants**, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Nearby stood six **stone water jars**, the kind used by the Jews for **ceremonial washing**, each holding from **twenty to thirty gallons**. 7 Jesus said to the **servants**, "Fill the **jars** with **water**"; so they filled them to the **brim**. 8 Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the **master** of the banquet." They did so, 9 and the **master** of the banquet tasted the **water** that had been turned into **wine**. He did not realize where it had come from, though the **servants** who had drawn the **water** knew. Then he called the **bridegroom** aside 10 and said, "Everyone brings out the choice **wine** first and then the cheaper **wine** after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have **saved the best** till now." 11 This, the first of his **miraculous signs**, Jesus performed at **Cana** in Galilee. He thus **revealed** his glory, and his **disciples** put their faith in him. 12 After this he went down to **Capernaum** with his **mother** and brothers and his **disciples**. There they stayed for a few days.

DISCUSSION QUESTION: Mary's compassion for the wedding couple brings forth a miracle from God through Jesus. Does my compassion have this same effect?

PRAYER: Gracious God, all throughout scriptural history humanity has imaged its final and everlasting time in your presence as a grand celebration where nothing ever runs out. John brings this hope into being at the very beginning of his words for me. May these words inspire me and gladden me as it did the wedding couple and their guests that day. Then I can delight with them in what you are doing in my life. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION:

THIRD DAY: Numbers are always significant in the gospels. Three is always used to indicate completion/incompletion or fullness/emptiness.

What do you think of when you hear the words "three days"? Is John preparing you for the end by including this at the beginning?

CANA /CAPERNAUM: Cana is about 4 miles NE of Nazareth on the road to Capernaum. All the other gospels have Jesus' ministry starting in Capernaum.

What might John be telling us by giving us this information? What would we miss about Jesus, his mother, and the disciples if we did not have this account of the wedding found only in John?

WEDDING: Weddings were one of the most important ways that the social structures of Jesus' day were put together and maintained. When people tried to talk about their ideas of heaven in the first testament they often used the analogy of a wedding banquet where nothing would ever run out.

How does this imagery help you as you try to imagine God's plan for us on earth and in heaven?

MOTHER /DISCIPLES: The fact that Jesus' mother and disciples were invited to the wedding means that this wedding was in Jesus' family. John's gospel never mentions Mary by name.

Would you have been at that wedding? If so, what would you think about what happened?

WINE: Wine was indispensable at weddings. Who could properly celebrate without wine? It must have been quite a party, because the wine ran out. Turning "water into wine" was a favorite feature of the cult of Dionysius who was a sex-crazed dancing god of the vine.

Is John telling us that the 'old wine' of the ways that people related to God has 'run out'? Do you experience God's love as a lavish celebration of you? How has the pagan custom been transformed by this miracle?

WOMAN: In Jesus' day, it was important for a man to establish his independence from his mother in public. By calling his mother 'woman', Jesus is telling us something.

What are we being told? How would it change things for you if he had called her mom? What is John telling us by using the word 'woman'?

INVOLVE: Jesus responds to his mother's prompting by reminding her that this is not his issue and he does not intend to become involved now.

If you had been Mary, what would you have made of this response? Would you have done as she did? What do you know about Jesus from this story? What do you know about God from this story?

TIME: Jesus was well advanced in age for his day at the time of this wedding. Most males were married before they were out of their teens, and had grown children by now. Yet Jesus still seems to be holding back from engaging in the customs of his day.

If you were Mary with an unmarried son of such age, what feelings might you have attending this wedding? What do you think people talked about as they encountered Jesus there that day? Would you have felt sorry for Mary, especially after hearing Jesus' response to her prompting?

SERVANTS: The servants were the only ones who knew the entire story of the water and wine from start to finish.

What do you think they talked about as they cleaned up after the wedding? Compare their response to Gn. 41:55.

SIX: Six was the number that indicated insufficiency. The number of jars prefigures the lack of the old ways of understanding God that left the people unsatisfied.

Is there anything in your current understanding of God that leaves you unsatisfied? What is it?

STONE WATER JARS: Stone was a material that was not thought to be porous and therefore could be cleaned before reuse without danger of ritual contamination.

What significance does this have for you in understanding what was going on in this event?

CEREMONIAL WASHING: Ritual was important. Ceremonial washing was one of the ways that people prepared for significant events of religious importance.

What rituals regarding your faith life are essential for you? Why?

20-30 GALLONS: An additional 120-180 gallons of very good wine would extend any celebration beyond all expectations.

What does this tell you about God's heavenly banquet?

WATER: Water is essential for life, and water made into wine brings the essential into the realm of luxury.

What does this tell you about God's plan for all creation?

BRIM: The jars were filled to the brim preventing any addition of something to effect the change. (See information below about magic)

Why is this information important? If you were a servant and had to explain what happened there that day, would this be important to share?

MASTER: Some translations use the words 'waiter in charge' here.

Which wording helps you the most? Why?

BRIDEGROOM: The bridegroom of the story seems to represent the way things were then. Jesus will become the new 'bridegroom' as his life unfolds.

What is the difference between the two 'bridegrooms' for you?

SAVED THE BEST: John is telling us the best is just now coming on the scene.

How does this sign story help you to understand God's ways?

MIRACULOUS SIGNS: Miraculous signs get peoples' attention, but they are important only as they point to what is really going on.
How do the miracles in the gospels help you to get the point?

REVEALED: Jesus is the full revelation of God for us Christians.
What has been revealed for you in this study process today?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Jn. 2:4 // Jn. 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; Jn. 2:11 // Jn. 4:54;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Is. 62:1-5; Ps. 96: 1-3, 7-10; 1 Cor. 12:4-11; Jn. 2: 1-11;
Revised Common Lectionary: Is. 62:1-5; Ps. 36:5-10; 1 Cor. 12:1-11; Jn. 2:1-12

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

According to the scholars who know these things, first century village weddings were extravagant affairs, far exceeding the ability of any couple, or pair of couples, to afford. It was expected that the entire clan pitch in and help, as a point of honor. So it was a bad sign when the wine started running low. It would suggest that the groom either hadn't made adequate arrangements, or worse, that his relatives were not doing their part, helping out. It was more than embarrassing, it was demeaning. And it would reflect badly on the entire clan, including Jesus and Mary. To she made her request, and Jesus saved the day, and the wedding, and maybe the marriage itself. Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2007. Pgs. 38.

We must look always for the hand of providence in our interruptions. Pg. 229
Rolheiser, Ronald. Against an Infinite Horizon. NY. Crossroad Pub. 2001

"But what would our spirits be, O God, if they did not have the bread of earthly things to nourish them, the wine of created beauties to intoxicate them, and the conflicts of human life to fortify them?" Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Capernaum: was located on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee at a place called Tell Hum. It was the chief commercial and social center of this area during the ministry of Jesus. Here, on the great highway between Syria and Palestine, custom taxes were collected and a Roman garrison was stationed. Here Jesus came after leaving Nazareth, and Peter's home became his home. Here he called Matthew and here he taught and preached, and did "many great works.

The Gospels that Didn't Make the Cut by Robert J. Miller in the August issue of Bible Review looks at the account of the wedding at Cana and develops the effect that the "Signs Gospel" had on the final form of John's Gospel. There are approximately 24 noncanonical gospels composed between the 2nd to 6th CE that didn't make it into the bible, but give us information about that formation period of early Christianity.

In early Christian art we find allusions to Jesus as a magician. He is pictured carrying a wand in a 4th Century painting from the Via Latina catacombs in Rome. In the mid-fifth century ivory diptych (two paneled visualization) Jesus has a wand in his hand as he changes the water into wine. For more information see: The Raising of Lazarus by Robin M. Jensen in the April 1995 issue of Bible Review. Pages 21ff.

Stone vessels: Articles made of stone are not susceptible to uncleanness (*Kelim 10.1, Parah 3,2*) It was thought that vessels made of pottery could absorb some of the previous contents and therefore would possibly mix things that were not to be mixed. Stone was not thought to be porous and therefore could be cleansed between uses.

NOTE: by the time this gospel was written, an explanation was needed for the Gentile converts for the need for stone jars.

Ancient Israel's Stone Age: Purity in Second Temple Times by Yitzhak Magen in the Sept./ Oct. 1998 issue of Biblical Archaeology Review (pages 46ff) has pictures of pots that archaeologists have found dating to the times of Jesus. Information about their manufacture and usage helps to give a sense of their significance in this gospel passage. Since the food laws prevented using the same dishes for different types of food, stone vessels were valued as they could be purified. Bathhouse benches were made of stone as well, as they could be cleaned. Pottery, if rendered 'unclean' had to be destroyed.

There are two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle. Albert Einsein

Origen (185?-254? AD) wrote "On First Principles" as an attempt to produce a systematic theology. In Book 4, chapter 2 he uses John 2:6 to teach that the word of the scriptures purifies the Jews. Ehrman, Bart. After the New Testament. NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 1998.

A miracle is "an event that is consistent with, but transcends, natural processes." This is the understanding of Terrance L. Nichols in his article Miracles in Science and Theology. Zygon 9/02. Pages 703 ff. A section called: Symposium of Miracles, Why Miracles starts in this issue on Page 701.

(Miracles) I don't believe in them, I rely on them to get me through daily life! Karl Rahner on miracles

Complaint of the wine steward

So my career has come to this: / most splendid vintage ever to / romance the palate, the cream of / pearled morning and heathery night / the wedding of weather and art / a bouquet like a queen's perfume, / sweet as melon, fragrant as lawn, / crisp as breeze, with the depth of / galaxy. In a drop I savor the cosmos.

Then hear the volume of the crowd / increasing, the laughter skittering / off loud edges, the telltale signs. / Silken elixir squandered on tipsy louts! / The mulish servants grunt, stupid as / six stone jars; the groom blinks, dull. / Driven, I must probe, that taste singing / in memory, that whiff of Eden tantalizing / the tongue: who wastes paradise on drunks? Kathy Coffey Christian Century 11/1/00 pg. 1112

The whole idea of compassion is based on a keen awareness of the interdependence of all these living beings, which are all part of one another and all involved in one another. - Thomas Merton

To be in loving kindness is to understand the other without the need to be understood. It is to experience giving and receiving together. Andrew Beath

Compassion: a robust dance between grace and wisdom.

John 2.1-12: Jesus' first sign: wedding at Cana. 1: Third day may foreshadow the resurrection, just as the wedding Banquet allude to the messianic banquet, the feast that will celebrate the inauguration of God's rule. Cana, village in the Galilee, about 9 mi (15 km) north of Nazareth. Mother of Jesus, Jesus' mother is never mentioned by name in this Gospel. 3: Jesus' mother expects him to remedy the situation. 4: Woman, an unusual address to one's "mother, but used in this Gospel to introduce a revelation to a woman (cf. 4.21; 19.26; 20.13,15). Hour, the hour of Jesus' death and glorification. 6: Rites of purification, ritual hand-washing that precedes the meal. This practice later described in b. Ber. 53b; b. Shabb. 62b; its presence in John indicates that the ritual was already common in the first century. Since the jars needed to be filled (again), presumably the washing had already taken place, the size of the jars may indicate that there were many guests. 9: Bridegroom, a double entendre referring to the bridegroom of the wedding and alluding to Jesus as the eschatological bridegroom (cf. 4.29). 11: First of signs, possible evidence for a "signs source" underlying the narrative (cf. 2.23; 3.2; 4-48,54; 6.14; 10.41; 12.18; .30). Gory, see L14n. 12: Capernaum, a town on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee. Brothers, see i3; 20.17; 21.23; Mk 6.3. Pg. 161. Levine, Amy-Jill & Brettler, Marc Zvi. The Jewish Annotated New Testament. NY: Oxford Univ. Press. 2011

There is not much profit in just thinking, "Wow, Jesus worked another miracle!" But there is much profit in noting the changed status, self-image, courage, and relationship to family or community that the cure invariably entails. This is the real transformative message. Richard Rohr

Where there is great love there are always miracles. - Willa Cather

"The motivating force of a seeker is always that which he seeks. The reality he is seeking is always there in his search. He could never search for the divine if he did not carry the divine within him. There are many seekers among us today who have not yet had that experience and do not know what they are seeking, but are haunted by a great longing and desire to find something they have lost. They turn to miracles and to the wondrous, the most direct way to awaken in primitive souls a belief in superior beings. But we should ask where miracles begin. What is there that is not miraculous? The simple fact that things exist, that a color is a color that a sound is a sound — this is all miraculous. Does it cease to become miraculous because it is known by everyone? And why is it only miraculous when it goes beyond the frontiers of the known?"

—Alphonse Goetmann, *Dialogue on The Path of Initiation: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of Karlfried Graf Durckheim* (New York, NY: Globe Press Books, 1991), p. 70

SELECTED READINGS:

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2007. Pgs. 37-40. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2010. Pgs. 27-31. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle C 2013. Pgs. 36-40. To order contact [Carol Oberfoell](#)

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