

¹Three days later, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. ²Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding.

³When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, “They have no wine.”

⁴Jesus said to her, “Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My time has not come yet.”

⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

⁶Six stone water jars, which the Jews used for ceremonial cleansing, were standing there, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus told them, “Fill the jars with water.” So they filled them to the brim. ⁸Then he said to them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” And they did.

⁹When the master of the banquet tasted the water that had now become wine, he did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew). The master of the banquet called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the guests have had plenty to drink, then the cheaper wine. You saved the good wine until now!”

¹¹This, the beginning of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

“I’ve got a surprise.” How many times did you hear that throughout your life? Maybe your heart flew with excitement as you wondered what it was. Maybe you even tried to guess. A new toy? A puppy? An exotic vacation? But your guesses shot too low. “No, better,” the person with the surprise said. It is with that spirit of surprises that we find Jesus today. In all the expectations people have about who Jesus is and what he’s doing in this section, it seems that none of them are shooting high enough.

There was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and as was the custom at the time, weddings were parties that stretched on for days. At this particular wedding, Jesus’ mother Mary was in attendance. Jesus and his disciples were also invited. But at one point during all the celebrating, a grave problem came about. They ran out of wine. This would be the death of the party. With no beverages to liven their hearts, many would call it quits and head home. The bride and groom, along with their families, would all be embarrassed.

Mary notices this issue brewing, so she turns to Jesus. “They have no wine,” she says to her son. Clearly, Mary expects Jesus to do something about it. But Jesus responds, “Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My time has not come yet.” Now, you have to understand that Jesus is not talking down to his mother. If I called my mother “woman,” I’d probably receive a pretty stern glare, but Jesus is only reframing their relationship. Mary had gotten caught up in thinking of Jesus as simply her son before. In the temple, as a child, Jesus had told her that he was there to do his Heavenly Father’s work. More than being her son, he was her Lord.

But it’s that last sentence that helps us understand what Jesus is saying: “My time has not come yet.” Mary has not forgotten that her son is God in flesh. She knows he has the power and authority to fix this wedding that is quickly going sideways. So, shouldn’t God, her son, help her and them?

But the time is not yet right. Mary is looking for an immediate solution to the wine problem to spare the young couple embarrassment. But Jesus’ focus is on his role as Savior. His focus is on fulfilling the Father’s will. As Jesus says, “what does that have to do with you and me?” he’s not telling Mary he doesn’t care. He’s telling her that his priorities are different than hers.

Sometime later, we see what seems to be Jesus doing the bidding of his mother Mary. What changed his mind? Why was he now willing to solve the wine problem? The truth is Jesus’ purpose in doing this miracle

was different than the purpose Mary had. As we'll see through all the parts of the sermon today, Jesus is revealing his divinity as Savior at the right time, in the right way, and to the right people.

In his interaction with Mary, Jesus proves something important to his mother. Her greatest hope here is that her son can be the savior of the party, that he can spare this poor couple the grief of the wedding falling off the tracks before the celebration has really begun. Of course, Jesus is there to be the Savior from sin, but in what he accomplishes at this wedding, we see that he cares for all our needs, from the greatest to the smallest.

We turn then to the servants. These men and women were hard at work for the wedding. And if you've spent any time waiting tables, you can probably imagine what a difficult position they were in now. "What do you mean you ran out of wine?" The guests were probably growing crabby fast. But then Mary comes over, points to her son, and says, "Do whatever he tells you."

This man turns to look at the six large stone jars, dragging your gaze over to them. They are filled with water for ceremonial cleaning. Think washing your hands, not to clean off any germs, but to clean off your heart full of sin. This son of Mary then tells you to fill the jars. And you're not too happy about that. What you want to say is, "Look at this wedding celebration. The wine's gone. People are going to leave soon. Why should we go through all that work of lugging water from the well all the way over here just to fill these jars with water that will be poured out in a few hours when everyone is gone?" But you're on the clock, so you do the work he's told you to do, even if you think it's a waste of time and energy.

After overfilling the jars with water, the man then tells you to bring a cup of it to the master of the banquet, the guy in charge of serving the food and drinks. You do as he says again, wondering how this will fix the issue that is growing more dire by the minute. He takes one drink of the water, and his eyes grow wide. He tips the cup, and you see what's inside. The water is no longer clear. It's red. And from the smell wafting from the cup, you can tell exactly what it is. You look back and forth a few times between the water jars you just filled and the cup of wine that your master holds in disbelief.

But the master doesn't know what you know. He doesn't know where this wine has come from. With haste, he rushes to the bridegroom to deliver the news: "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the guests have had plenty to drink, then the cheaper wine. You saved the good wine until now!" Along with the surprise about the extra wine, maybe there's even some frustration in his voice. Does the groom not know how weddings are supposed to be carried out? You start with the strong wine, then when people are starting to feel the effects of the wine, you start serving the weaker and cheaper stuff. But this is all backwards.

You, as one of the servants who have seen this all play out, look to the man who told you to fill the jars then bring the cup to the master. Who is he? How did he change this water into wine, and not just any wine, but the best wine? Maybe you ought to find out more about him and listen more closely next time he speaks.

Finally, I want to spend some time looking at the guys who have no part in this account except for sitting in the audience watching it all happen. The disciples came with Jesus to this feast. But they didn't know Jesus all that well yet. The ones who had been following Jesus the longest had only been doing it for less than a week, still trying to figure out who this man was. They knew Jesus was from God, the "lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," as John the Baptist said. But how? And when?

But then they saw all this. They saw Mary come with her statement that the wine was gone and her assumed request that he should do something about it. Then they heard Jesus telling her that it was not the time yet. Later they stood and watched as Jesus commanded the servants to do the ridiculous task of hauling all that water, only to hand a cup of it to the master of the banquet. But this water once used for sorrow and confession was now wine for rejoicing and thanksgiving.

Now, I think there's a lot for us to glean from this section of Scripture. We learn that Jesus works to take care of our deepest problems, even if those problems are not the ones on our mind right here and now. Mary's priorities are misguided. She's stuck on what's right in front of her eyes instead of what's going on in the hearts of every person at that wedding. But Jesus is focused on their hearts. Here he begins his road to rescue the world by letting the disciples in on the miraculous signs he will continue to perform to gain an audience for the gospel.

But Jesus also shows us that he doesn't do just enough to get us by. He does not give us half of himself. He gives us the whole. We see it clearly here with the wine. When the party was in need, any wine would have done the trick. And yet, Jesus transforms the water into the best wine, and literally a half a ton of it. When Jesus gives us gifts, he gives us the best. No, this doesn't mean he gives us the best-paying jobs or the nicest homes or the fanciest cars, but he does give us what is best for our physical and spiritual well-being. And as we look at our salvation, he gives us the best there too. Jesus would take away all our sins. There would be nothing left for us to clean up. Even faith which receives and believes these promises would not be up to us. It would be a gift given by God. And why would Jesus give us such a thorough gift? It wouldn't only be because thoroughness is what Jesus does. It would be because this is the only way we could be saved, through the gift of salvation.

And how does our Savior give us what we need to keep us close to him in life? He often uses other people. This is why we should never take for granted the family of believers we have here. These people are not just people who happen to come to the same place on Sunday that we do. We share the most important thing in life with them, a common bond in the promises of God, those promises that we share with each other as we sing hymns to each other and confess our faith to each other with words and with our actions. Just as Jesus uses the servants to bring his first miracle to life, he uses you to carry his message to hearts longing for free and full release from the agonies of sin.

What is it that Jesus brings today? A solution to a bride and groom's biggest gaffe? Some sweet wine to quench the thirst some party-goers? Signs and wonders to shock the audience? No, better. He brings salvation. He brings forgiveness. Amen.