
SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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"Jesus, The Life of the Party" (Encounters With Jesus Series)

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The Wedding at Cana - John 2:1-11 — **1** *On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 9 When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now."*

11 *Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*

Good morning! Thank you Pastor Dan for the introduction. And thank you all for the privilege and honor of being allowed to serve you and this church. I am truly grateful for the opportunity.

This morning, we continue with our "Encounters with Jesus" sermon series, in which we examine the encounters that Jesus had with people in the Gospels. Today, we'll be looking at Jesus' first miracle of turning water into wine at a wedding.

I'm excited to preach about a wedding because it gives me the opportunity to share that Pastor Dan was actually the pastor who performed the wedding ceremony for my wife, Alia, and me almost 14 years ago. At the time, Alia and I were living in California, but our wedding would be in Hawaii, where Alia grew up. We didn't know any pastors on the island, so Pastor Dan was introduced as a family friend.

We met Pastor Dan the week of our wedding for some pre-marital counseling, he married us on a Saturday, and then we went back to California and didn't see him again for almost a decade. When we moved back to Hawaii in 2010 and started attending First Prez, we said, "Hey! "That's the guy who married us!"

Will you join me in prayer? Jesus, may You be glorified today. May we see You now as You truly are. In Your Name, Amen.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus and His disciples are at a rural wedding when the wine runs out. Jesus' mother lets Him know this; He gives some instructions; and He turns water into wine.

Why does God want us to know this miracle...about beverages? Clearly, Jesus is amazing. He raises people from the dead, feeds 5,000 people at a time, heals the deaf and blind and paralyzed. The four Gospel authors (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) record at least 37 miracles that Jesus performed—and it is an incomplete list!

John, the author of our passage today, says this at the end of his Gospel: "*But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.*" - Jn 21:25

So there are all these amazing things Jesus did. The Gospel authors only write about 37 miracles and John chooses to present only seven miracles in his gospel, by far the fewest of all the authors.

And John doesn't call them miracles. He calls them "signs".

At the end of our passage today, John calls turning water to wine at a wedding – the *"first of Jesus' signs"*; and that it *"revealed His glory"*.

A sign is something that points you to something else; it directs you to see something bigger than itself. And this miracle is a sign that points to something much bigger than drinks. It points to who Jesus is, His purpose on earth, and *our* role in that story.

Near the end of John's gospel, John explains: *"Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and through believing you may have life in his name."* - John 20:30-31

So that's why God wants us to know about this miracle. This miracle is told to us, so that we may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and through believing have LIFE in His name.

But how? How do we get from "water into wine" to "believe in Jesus and have life"? What does God want us to know about Jesus, by making this the first miracle?

Let me tell you, if Jesus were starting His ministry today and I were giving him advice—two big hypotheticals, I know—I would tell him, "Jesus, it's your first miracle. Don't do it way out at some rural wedding, solving the minor problem of two disorganized teenagers who didn't plan their refreshments correctly. Here's what you do. Go to the Superbowl—at the half-time show

with millions of people watching—right before Beyonce comes on...raise someone from the dead. That's a first miracle. Big. Extravagant. Powerful. Then, give everyone a fish sandwich. "

Thankfully, Jesus doesn't need my advice. And neither does John, our author, who is the only one of the four Gospel authors to include this miracle. John's not randomly choosing seven miracles to include. John is one of Jesus' closest friends. John is the only one of the 12 disciples who stays with Jesus when Jesus is crucified. John is the one Jesus instructs from the cross, "This is my mother, Mary. Take care of her after I'm gone."

John knows Jesus very well. So of all the things John could write about, he is very thoughtfully and carefully introducing us to Jesus.

What does God want us to know about Jesus, from the fact that the first miracle was turning water into wine at a wedding?

Here it is: Jesus is the life of the party!

There is transformation that takes place in this miracle. Jesus changes water into wine. That is no small thing. But there is a much bigger transformation that we are meant to see than just beverage availability. And the key to seeing it is in the six stone water jars in the middle of the passage.

"Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding 20 or 30 gallons." - John 2:6

Three pieces of background information will help us understand what is happening

here. First, according to Jewish ceremonial law, people became symbolically unclean by touching objects of everyday life. To become ceremonially clean, they would use the water in these jars to wash their hands and utensils before the meal, between courses, and after the meal.

Second, according to Jewish tradition, the number seven was a number that was complete and perfect. The number six, therefore, (the number of jars in our passage), was seen as a number that was unfinished, and imperfect.

Third, there was a common saying among first century Rabbis, "Without wine, there is no joy."

So, from this context, Jesus uses the six ceremonial water jars to perform this miracle. Jesus could have used anything. He could have made it rain wine if He wanted to. But He uses the six ceremonial jars to illustrate this bigger transformation He is the center of—not just water to wine—but the transformation from the stone, cold, empty imperfection of human religion and our attempts to purify ourselves, to the joy and abundance of a feast and relationship with Jesus.

In these six stone jars, Jesus transforms ceremonial purification water into 150 gallons of wine. That's the equivalent of 756 bottles of wine. This is not a commentary on wine, and let's be clear, drunkenness is addressed strongly both by the first century rabbis and the rest of the Bible. This miracle is about JOY. This miracle is sign of the abundance in life that is possible when Jesus is involved.

This is not a beverage miracle. This is a feast miracle. This is a party miracle.

And Jesus is at the center of the party—Jesus, the Life of the party.

This is how Jesus describes His purpose later in the book of John: *“I came that they [meaning us] may have life, and have it abundantly.”* John 10:10

Jesus came so that we might have abundant lives, lives filled with joy, and all manner of riches—riches even greater than \$1.5 billion Powerball riches.

Did you get caught up in this weeks’ \$1.5 billion lottery drawing? Did you dream about what you would do with 1.5 billion?

All the lottery hype made me remember a TV show I saw when I was a kid. The show was about this employee of the lottery, whose job it was would travel around the country and tell people that they had won the lottery. The episode I remember, 30 year later, was one where the winner of the lottery, and millions of dollars, mistakenly thinks the lottery employee was someone from the IRS there to levy taxes and collect on debts. So the whole show is full of network TV hijinks with the winner doing everything possible to avoid the lottery employee, and the lottery employee going to great lengths to just try and tell the winner the good news and give him this huge check.

Let me tell you some good news: You’ve won the lottery! No, not \$1.5 billion, but something even better.

Because this miracle is telling us that all the riches in this world pale in comparison to the riches of the kingdom of God and the abundant life we are invited to.

Jesus is inviting us to a feast, and like the lottery employee from that old show, He is going to great

lengths to track us down and let us know that we’ve won! Riches, and joy, and an abundant life, available to us now!

This is how the prophet Isaiah describes this feast, to which we are invited, where Jesus is the life of the party:

6 *“On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.*

7 *And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations;*

8 *he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.*

9 *It will be said on that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” - Isaiah 25:6-9*

I love this passage, and its description of the feast, because it is glorious and it acknowledges that there is great pain, and suffering and tragedy in life. And even more, that there is great pain, and suffering and tragedy in *our* lives. There are people here today battling cancer, mourning the death of a loved one, fighting for their marriage or struggling with divorce or loneliness. I am amazed by the depth of the stories of the people in this church...and I have no easy answers for this pain.

But Jesus understands this pain. He longs more than we do for the day when the shroud cast over all people will be destroyed; when death will be swallowed up

forever, and tears will be wiped away from all faces. He longs for this eternal feast. And He longs for us to be at this feast, as *His* guest.

That is what Jesus is showing us when He changes water to wine at a wedding. He is inviting us to be His guest at a feast, which is bigger and greater and grander than we can imagine.

When Alia and I were living in California, a friend invited us to a New Year’s party at his parents’ house. So we said sure, and invited another unrelated friend to come with us. And as we are driving to this party in Silicon Valley following the GPS, we start going higher and higher into the hills, and houses start getting further and further apart and much, much bigger. And we keep going until we reach the address, and it’s at the top of this mountain, and it is a mansion—like Downtown Abbey mansion; Bruce Wayne mansion. We sit there kind of stunned, and my friend in the car says, “Chris, you didn’t tell me your friend was a gazillionaire!”

So today, I want to invite you to come with me to party at my friend’s Father’s house. It will be a party—a feast. And I should let you know, that my friend’s name is Jesus, and He is a gazillionaire.

This is probably a good time to mention that the feast is free, but it is not without its cost. Let’s look at Jesus’ response to His mother for just a minute.

In John 2:4, after Mary tells Jesus the wine’s out, Jesus says, *“Woman...My hour has not come yet.”* Don’t let the use of “woman” here throw you. It’s the same way Jesus addresses Mary later, when He is on the cross, as He says to Mary that John will take care of her.

He says, “Woman, here is your son”, with much tenderness. Some translations use, “Dear woman” or “Dear lady.”

It is the phrase, “My hour has not come yet” that carries the weight here. In the book of John, the use of the phrase “hour” always refers metaphorically to the climatic event of Jesus’ death and resurrection. It is used multiple times in the book of John. Here are just two examples.

“Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his HOUR had come to depart from this world and go to the Father.” - John 13:1

And at the end of the last supper, John 17:1: *“After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, “Father, the HOUR has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you.”*

When Jesus refers to the “hour,” it is a sign of his coming sacrifice on the cross and his resurrection. Jesus isn’t telling His mother here, “It’s not time, I don’t want to do a miracle,” and then after a few minutes, sighs a frustrated sigh and does a miracle. By pointing to the “hour” to come, Jesus is signaling to His mother, and the disciples, and us, the greater purpose for His ministry—an hour when He will sacrifice everything for us on the cross. So that even at the start of His ministry, at this rural wedding, we know He is focused on and committed to the end. That’s the cost He is willing to pay to invite us to the feast.

I hope this helps us see Jesus more clearly. Here is something else that I hope allows us to see Jesus more clearly.

A famous educator was once described by a colleague like

this: “She made me feel as if I was bathed in sunshine.”

We are lucky, because we live in Hawaii and it’s not hard for us to picture what it is like to be bathed in sunshine. This is how people felt, and feel, in the presence of Jesus—bathed in sunshine.

“I am the light of the world”, Jesus says later in John. “Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.” Jesus makes people feel like they are bathed in sunshine.

Let’s not forget the simple detail that Jesus is at this wedding party. He was right at home in festive occasions, and used parties and celebrations in His teachings all the time. In the parable of the Prodigal son, what happens when the son comes home? They have a party. When the lost coin is found? Party. Lost sheep found? Party.

Jesus is involved in the regular lives and celebrations of people. And people seek out His company. But Jesus goes further. He not only says that He is the light of the world. He says that “we are the light of the world.”

In the presence of Jesus, with Him in our lives, not only will we feel bathed in sunlight, but other people will feel like they are bathed in sunlight in our presence because of Jesus. Not a little candle, or lamp, but bright, shining, like the sun. So, how are we doing on this one?

Have you ever seen a baby eat a lemon? It is hilarious. And it is cute in babies, not so cute in Christians. But I fear that this is how we come across sometimes. Not bright shining like the sun, but as Martin Luther called it “sour-faced.” Criticizing, “awfulizing”

with pessimism, is how Pastor Steve described it two weeks ago.

Some commentators on this miracle note that if you ran out of wine at a wedding in the first century, you might be liable to be sued by your guests. (Lawyers... even in Jesus’s day!) But who would do that? Who would sue the groom if you were at a wedding and the wine ran out?

I think we all would and we all do. I think we come to our lives with certain expectations of how it should be and what we deserve. And when we are disappointed, we make a sour face. The religious people in Jesus’ day, the Pharisees, made a sour-face because Jesus didn’t spend time with the right people, complaining to Jesus’ disciples, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”

I don’t want to look sour-faced. I don’t want to be complainer. You know who I want to look like? This guy [photo of Pastor Dan in disco attire]. This is Pastor Dan Chun, who understands divorce, and depression, and the joy of a life with Christ.

Or this guy, Ron Mathieu, [photo of Ron in whoopee cushion costume] who spoke poignantly a few weeks ago about suicide and grief, and knows the joy of a life with Christ.

In fact, I gotta tell you, I love this church, because it is full of people who don’t walk around with a sour-face. This is a church that is authentic about who we are and we don’t take ourselves too seriously. We are a hospital for sinners, not a museum for saints. We are a church that strives to multiply each other’s joys, and divide each other’s sorrows.

And this church is full of wacky, joyous people [slide show of wacky church staff and members].

And this is a fraction of the pictures I could have shown.

Let's get practical for a minute. Do you want to battle against sour-face and cultivate a life of joy? It starts with gratitude.

There's a psychology study from UC Davis, in which they randomly divided two groups of people. One group was asked to keep a written list of all the daily irritations they faced or things that displeased them. This was the sour-face group. The other group was asked to keep a list of the things they were grateful for that occurred during the week.

At the end of ten weeks, the people in the randomly created grateful group were more optimistic, felt better about their lives, exercised more and made fewer trips to the doctor than the sour-face group. They started the same, but became like this by practicing gratitude.

Let's try an experiment. Today, and this week, at dinner or before you go to bed, list three things that you grateful for—big or little. If you can write them down, even better. In fact, let's start right now. Think about three things. I'll wait.

I'll tell you mine. 1) I'm grateful I get to be part of this wonderful, wacky church. 2) I'm grateful for my amazing wife and kids. And 3) I'm grateful that this sermon is almost over! Your list may share some of the same items as mine!

There is one last thing I think that we are meant to understand from Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding. And it is that the life

of this party, Jesus, is also the Groom at the eternal feast.

Jesus refers to Himself as the groom on a number of occasions in the gospels, and the kingdom of God like a wedding. The Apostle Paul writes about the marriage of Christ and the church, as does John again in the book of Revelation.

You may be here today, single, longing for a partner. Or you may be in a marriage that is in difficulty, or recently ended. Jesus understands that longing. Jesus has been in your shoes—the single person at the wedding, longing for their own special day. And in Jesus' longing, you are the object of that longing. We are the object of that longing.

If you are lonely, or heartbroken today, Jesus longs for you. If you are in a perfectly happy marriage, or are perfectly happy as a single person, Jesus still longs for you.

Alice Yoder, who I think is a national treasure and is a long-time member of our church, went through a time of deep grieving after her husband of 59 years passed away. And she wondered, "Who would take care of me now?" And what ultimately gave her comfort was this verse in Isaiah:

"For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called." - Isaiah 62:5

If you'll indulge me, I'd like to show a picture from my wedding. As you know, no one cares about the groom on the wedding day. Everyone is looking at the bride.

But at our wedding, a photographer happened to snap a blurry shot of my reaction to seeing my bride for the first time on our wedding day. [Photo of elated groom is shown].

One thousand times this, is the face that Jesus has when He sees you—when He sees us, the church, presented faultless and pure, without spot or wrinkle. We are the joy for which Jesus endured the cross, and overcame death.

For richer or poorer, in joy and sorrow, in sickness and in health, in life and in death, Jesus will be there.

Isaiah 62:5 says, *"As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."*

Do we see now why the first miracle is turning water to wine at a wedding? The water turns to wine, to show us the abundant feast that is prepared for us; and it happens at a wedding, to show us that it is Jesus Himself, who waits for us at the feast.

Let's pray. Jesus we give You praise and thanks. We accept Your invitation to the feast. There is no one like You. You are greater and higher than any other. And all God's people say, "Amen!"

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org. The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com