



Sermon Preparatory Notes

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Sermon Notes:

Gospel Commentary from Working Preacher

The Wedding at Cana is unique to the Fourth Gospel and is the first of Jesus' seven signs in the narrative. It presents an interesting contrast to next week's text from Luke. Both stories narrate the first acts of Jesus' public ministry, which provide important clues to who Jesus is for the respective author. For Matthew, why the Sermon on the Mount? For Mark, why an exorcism? We bring the same question to Luke and John. For Luke next week, why a return to his hometown? And for John, why water into wine?

These two events back to back are more than appropriate for the second and third Sundays after Epiphany. What do they reveal about who Jesus is and what Jesus will do? We should remember that the miracles Jesus performs in the Fourth Gospel are never called miracles but signs. In other words, the miracle itself is not really what we are supposed to see, as miraculous as it is.

True, water into wine would be quite something, especially on a Sunday afternoon in Minnesota. Rather, the miracles point to a truer revelation about Jesus. This could be an important way to move through the season of Epiphany. Revelation for revelation's sake is really not the point. What deeper reality is Jesus revealing? What are we supposed to see about Jesus?

An Epiphany of Abundance

The word "grace" occurs only four times in the Fourth Gospel and only in the Prologue (1:1-18). Why? One could make the argument, as many scholars do, that John's source for the Prologue was an extant hymn that John borrowed and inserted into his narrative.

But what if we take the incarnation seriously and suggest that once the Word becomes flesh, the rest of the Gospel shows you what grace tastes like, looks like, smells like, sounds like, feels like?

That is, Jesus' signs *show* you, don't tell you, what abundant grace is, "from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (1:16). Turning water into wine is revealing of abundant grace in this season of Epiphany. And what does abundant grace taste like? Like the best wine when you are expecting the cheap stuff. It's one thing to say, "Jesus is the source of grace." It's quite another to have an experience of it. So much of our preaching tends toward telling people *about* Jesus. What if in the season of Epiphany, we commit to creating experiences of Jesus so that there can be no doubt that Christmas was real?

The details of abundance cannot be overlooked in this text -- six water jars, each 20-30 gallons, filled to the brim, of the best wine. The amount in and of itself is extraordinary. But the best wine? At this point in a wedding celebration? Unheard of. Back in the day, weddings typically lasted a week, where the host would serve the better wine when the guests could actually taste what they were drinking, a nice Sonoma-Cutrer Russian River Chardonnay, perhaps. Only after a few days of drinking and determined levels of inebriation would the guests be served the Franzia box Merlot or Gallo jug Chablis. Where have you experienced this kind of grace? Perhaps we can even think out of the box and imagine these more tangible presences rather than theologizing grace down to a mere doctrine.

Do What Your Mother Tells You

Another important detail in this first sign, this first act of Jesus' public ministry, is that his mother is present. In the Gospel of John, the mother of Jesus is never named, never called Mary. She is always denoted by her relationship to Jesus. Here, it is her urging that initiates Jesus' action.

The exchange between Jesus and his mother is really quite funny and we do our congregation members no favors by insisting that the Bible is void of humor. She notes that the wedding hosts have run out of wine. Jesus' response is that they should have hired a better wedding planner. But then, she tells the servants to do whatever Jesus says. I have this image of the mother of Jesus much like encouraging your child to get on the school bus for the first time: "Come on, you can do it! I know you can!" But I also wonder what she saw in that moment. What had Jesus revealed to her up to that point that would cause her to believe that such a miracle was possible from him? How did she know that this was the time for revelation, the event of Epiphany?

The mother of Jesus appears only twice in the Gospel of John, at the wedding at Cana and at the foot of the cross. While we are not told about here about her reoccurrence later in the Gospel, we get a hint of her return in Jesus' reason for what seems to be a refusal of her request, "My hour has not yet come." Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus will refer to his "hour" which signals the time of his death.

It is more than poignant that the mother of Jesus brackets his life, surrounds Jesus' earthly ministry. She is at the beginning of his career and watches him die. She is the nurturing force when he is the Word made flesh, a shared parenthood with God, the father. What difference does this make for preaching this text in the season of Epiphany? Perhaps it might help us to remember Jesus in a manger in the midst of miracles. Perhaps it is a reminder that whenever Jesus reveals his divinity, he is simultaneously revealing something about his humanity. Perhaps, in the sign that it is water into wine, we might even experience something that we need to know about ourselves.

[Karoline Lewis](#) On Working Preacher

ESV Study Notes for John 2:1-11

John 2:1 This is the **third day**—that is, two days after Jesus' encounter with Nathanael ([1:43–51](#)). This continues the narration of Jesus' activities spanning an entire week (see the references to “the next day” in [1:29](#), [35](#), [43](#)). **Cana in Galilee.** Archaeological attention has focused on the excavation site of Khirbet Kana, 8.3 miles (13 km) north of Nazareth, as the most likely locale for the Roman town of Cana. Excavation of this site has revealed substantial quantities of Roman potsherds, thus confirming Roman-era occupation; it also features a prime location on the Roman road from Ptolemais to Magdala.

John 2:3 The wedding party's running out of wine may be seen as symbolizing the spiritual barrenness of first-century Judaism, especially against an OT background that viewed wine (but never drunkenness) as a sign of joy and God's blessing ([Ps. 104:15](#); [Prov. 3:10](#); cf. [Matt. 26:29](#)).

John 2:4 Jesus' address for his mother, **Woman**, is an expression of polite distance, as is his question to her. **My hour has not yet come.** In John, Jesus' “hour” is the time of his crucifixion, at which time his saving work is accomplished in his atoning death (see [7:30](#); [8:20](#); [12:23](#), [27](#); [13:1](#); [17:1](#); also note on 7:30). At this point in his ministry, because of people's misconceptions about the coming Messiah, Jesus chooses not to reveal himself openly to Israel (though he does perform numerous messianic “signs”; see note on 2:11). Even this miracle is done quietly. Compared to the other Gospels, John places less emphasis on Jesus' public ministry and more emphasis on his private ministry to specific individuals.

John 2:6 six stone water jars. Archaeologists have found large goblet-shaped stone storage jars from this period in Jerusalem and elsewhere. The examples were lathe-cut from sizable single blocks of stone.

John 2:11 signs. Miracles that attest to Jesus' identity as Messiah and Son of God and lead unbelievers to faith. John specifies that after this sign, Jesus' **disciples believed in him** (cf. [v. 23](#)). The statement that this was **the first** of his signs indicates that Jesus did not do any miracles during his childhood or early manhood (contrary to dozens of apocryphal “gospel stories” outside the NT) but lived as an ordinary man with his divine identity hidden (cf. [7:5](#)). In each of the signs that John includes, the emphasis is on the way in which the “sign” reveals Jesus' messianic character (cf. [12:37–40](#); [20:30–31](#)) and on the exceptional and striking nature of the feat accomplished by Jesus—such as the large quantity and high quality of wine ([2:6](#), [10](#)), the fact that the official's son is healed a long distance away by the sheer power of Jesus' word ([4:47](#), [49–50](#)), the

invalid's recovery from a 38-year-long ordeal ([5:5](#)), the large quantity of food produced by Jesus ([6:13](#)), the man's recovery from lifelong blindness ([9:1–2](#)), and the raising of Lazarus after four days in the tomb ([11:17](#), [39](#)). **and manifested his glory**. This miracle showed the glory of Jesus as the sovereign Creator and ruler of the material universe and also as the merciful God who provides abundantly for his people's needs (cf. [1:14](#)). **John 2:12** Jesus **went down** from Cana to Capernaum, since Cana was in the hill country while Capernaum was at the Sea of Galilee. **Capernaum** is about 16 miles (26 km) to the northeast of Cana and could easily be reached in a day's journey (see note on Mark 1:21). Capernaum served as Jesus' headquarters after the Baptist's imprisonment ([Matt. 4:12–13](#); [Luke 4:28–31](#); cf. [Matt. 9:1](#)).