

A Sermon for Dayspring Baptist Church
By Chris Fillingham
Beyond Beliefs part 2: New Wine
John 2:1-11
January 14, 2017

We're in week two of our series, "Beyond Beliefs," where the gospel of John is carrying us up on eagle's wings to see the horizon beyond the concrete... to see a reality in Jesus beyond any statements about Jesus.

Last week I talked about how John wants us to use a different set of eyes to see in a new way. And then, this Tuesday morning, I came across a quote from Richard Rohr in his daily meditation that gets right to the heart of what I was trying to say last week.

You may have seen it on my FB post this week. Rohr writes,

"You cannot know God the way you know anything else; you only know God or the soul of anything subject to subject, center to center, by a process of 'mirroring' where like knows like and loved knows love--"deep calling unto deep" (Psalm 42:7). The Divine Spirit planted deep inside each of us yearns for and responds to God--and vice versa."

Deep calls to deep.

This is how we come to know God,
the Spirit in us, responding to the Spirit in God.
Center to center, like to like.

And this... is how the Gospel of John invites us to encounter Jesus. Rather than focusing on *beliefs about Jesus*, John invites us to *encounter a reality in Jesus*. And there really is such a difference between those two things, isn't there? ... between beliefs about someone... and encountering the reality of... someone.

Just think for a moment what it means for you to know someone you love: a child, a parent, a friend.

Do you know them by knowing about them?
Or do you know them by being in his or her presence?

We really know someone when something in us, encounters something in them: center to center, spirit to spirit, mirroring one another.

This is also how we come to know and love God. This is what faith actually looks like. Faith really is something beyond "belief" statements.

"The divine Spirit planted deep inside each of us yearns for and responds to God—and the Spirit of God yearns for and responds to you."

And this, Dayspring, is what we see happening... in the Gospel of John... over and over again.

So in John, whenever Jesus does something we'd call miraculous, he doesn't call it a miracle. He calls it... a *sign*. That's one of the key words in John's gospel.

Jesus' miracles aren't just a miraculous event, or even simply a healing gift. John always describes them as a *sign*.

They are pointing to something beyond the event itself.

They are pointing to...a deeper reality alive in Jesus that we are invited to encounter.

And this morning we heard the *first of these signs*.
It happened... in the middle... of a great big party.

You see, in those days, wedding celebrations were in many ways an even bigger deal than they are today.

Remember, the average person in this time didn't have much. They worked just to provide for that day. There was hardly ever any experience of abundance.

Which meant that most meals were pretty simple.

There was no Golden Corral, all-you-could-eat-buffet.

There was no big Sunday meal. Or weekend splurging.

No nightly dessert after dinner, or weekend cocktail party.

That just wasn't part of their life.

In fact, most days they probably didn't even have meat to eat...let alone rich foods to enjoy. Remember, the average town, and the average person, and the average family were peasants... scraping by, doing hard work... making just enough to survive. That was normal for them.

But there was one exception to the rule.

One event you'd save your life for...

One time when you knew your belly would be filled...

One time, when you might get to have a steak, or lobster...

One occasion when there was an open bar... And that was at a wedding!

This is why the wedding feast is such a powerful and repeated image in the Bible...

Weddings were an exceptional time. They interrupted the dry, mundane, dusty pattern of every day living
with a huge party, and celebration, and feast!

And the weddings were a whole community affair. It wasn't just for your closest family or friends. The whole village was invited to the wedding. Everyone came. And it didn't just last for a few hours. It could last for a few days, even.

Imagine that... a whole year goes by... maybe 3 or 4 years go by where you only have watery potato soup.

But then... then your neighbor's daughter is getting married.

And you know there is going to be all the best food, and there's no end in sight. For the first time your stomach will be full,
and your taste buds will be exploding with delight.

For the first time since you can remember, you aren't just given a small glass of watered down tasteless drink. There's going to be the richest, most delightful drink you can imagine...
and there will be all you could possibly want!

Imagine what that would be like, that juxtaposition.

Weddings were unlike anything else in those villages. In a town like Cana or Galilee, a wedding meant everything else stopped. Everyone got to celebrate. Everyone got a taste of a different reality.

So of course, Jesus and his disciples are hanging out there too. If they were in town and there was a wedding, that's where they would be.

And just in case you've forgotten, or no one has ever told you, Jesus liked to party... and play... and laugh... and celebrate... and so did his disciples.

It may not be how you're used to thinking about Jesus, but it needs to be... because this is who he was.

Shoot, Jesus was probably right in the middle of the dance floor... *doing the hokey-pokey* with the rest of them... "Put your right arm in, take your right arm out!... and shake it all about." *Jesus was shaking it all about. He was!*

He's so into it that Andrew is a bit embarrassed. "Umm... Jesus, you might take it down a notch. People are watching."

But Jesus didn't mind being watched. He calls out to Nathaniel, "Hey Nate, I told you that you were going to see heaven open on me... well watch these heavenly moves." And he busts out into, *[singing]* "YMCA, We talking about the YMCA."

Jesus is letting loose.

And Nathaniel starts laughing so hard that wine comes out his nose... which of course makes everyone at the table with him laugh too...

And before you know it, Jesus is singing from "Hamilton." "*To the Bride! To the Bride! To the Groom! To the Groooooom.*"

And everyone there is having the time of his or her lives.

When out of nowhere... his mom pulls him from the dance floor... and off to the side she whispers: "Jesus, they're out of wine!"

Now, this is no small emergency.

Remember, this is a culture where hospitality is one of the highest virtues,
and for a wedding there was an expectation of unending hospitality.

Not only that, this is an honor/shame culture...
even more than ours.

Your worth, and your family's worth, and the value of your friendships, and even the value of your business, was deeply connected to your honor.

Honor was something that was hard earned,
and protected at all costs.
Shame wasn't just humiliation, it was devastation.

And the whole village is here at this wedding, remember?

And they've been looking forward to this wedding even more than the bride and groom have...
And to disappoint...

to run out of wine,
to come up short changed...

well, that could cast a cloud over the parents, and a cloud over this marriage... and, let's face it, a cloud over their lives.

“Jesus, they’re out of wine!” Mary says.
“The reserves are all used up. There’s nothing left.”
“Jesus, they’re empty.” [pause]

And this is where we first encounter something unexpected in Jesus. This is what gets the ball rolling. This starts the first sign... in the Gospel of John.

It all begins when they have to face what they’ve been trying to hide from everyone around them... from their friends, and family, and neighbors, and acquaintances, and business partners... They have to face... their emptiness.

[Slower]

This is where the spiritual journey often begins.
At some point, we come face to face with our emptiness.
At some point, we’ll be staring at the bottom of the barrel,
and we have to come face to face with our limitations. And if we’re ready to be honest,
we’ll say, “Jesus, I’m... all out of wine. Jesus, I’m empty.”

Maybe we’ll look back at the road behind us, at where we’ve been,
and look forward to the challenges in front of us... and we will know that it’s more than
we can do on our own.
“Jesus, I’m empty.”

Maybe we see what everyone else wants from us, and needs from us, and there’s nothing we can
do but say, “Jesus, I’m empty.”

It might happen when the music is still pumping, and everyone around you seems to be having a
great time, and they are still laughing and living life without the challenges you have to face... Maybe
you feel all alone in the shadow of the party going on around you.

And there’s nothing you can do but say, Jesus, “I’m empty.”

That’s where the invitation to our spiritual lives begin. Because in our emptiness, the most
unexpected things can happen.

Jesus has a way of taking the huge empty jars of your soul... and filling them with an unexpected
goodness that you could not have imagined.

But to do that, he might ask you to do something that doesn’t make a lot of sense... Other people
might think you’re being kind of silly. But Mary offers us a bit of wisdom... something she has
already learned. *[whisper]* “Do whatever he tells you,” she says. “Just do it.”

I imagine those servants thought filling those jars with... water was the craziest thing. “That’s
not going to fool anyone,” they’re thinking. “I better not lose my job over this.”

And I imagine they thought it was even crazier to offer a cup from those jars to the wine taster,
the wedding master... who has no idea what is taking place.

And I imagine their stomachs were in knots when the wedding master began to speak. “Most
people use the best wine first...” he said. “But not at this party. This wine is even greater than before!”

The wedding master is giddy.

No one would have expected this... but a new and better wine was coming out now.
Suddenly this wedding went
from disaster to redemption,
from shame to honor,
from a bust, to the best party anyone could remember.

Whatever happened in those empty jars... with Jesus involved... it became better wine than anyone had expected to taste that day.

This is what happens when we bring our emptiness to Jesus.
When our emptiness encounters the presence of Christ, something is filled... and in that filling there is more going on than what we realize. ***The simple water can become the intoxication of new wine.***

And in that new wine there is celebration and joy... and something overflows from your being that is ***“even greater than before.”***

And this... this unexpected filling of our emptiness... this is the first sign, John says.

So, instead of spending all your energy trying to figure out Jesus... or define Jesus... which I imagine we're a lot more worried about than Jesus ever was...

Instead, step aside from all the action around you...
bring the emptiness that you've been hiding...
that you've been afraid to show anyone...
bring your emptiness to Jesus.

And as strange as it might seem,
do whatever he tells you to do.

Because Jesus wants to fill you with new wine,
and invite you to join him back out on the dancing floor.
Where your blood will start pumping,
and your body sweating,
and your heart filling,
and joy overflowing,
Jesus is going to invite you to the dance floor of your life, where you will be made alive again.
Amen.

Silent Prayer

*I cannot dance, Lord, unless you lead me.
If you want me to leap with abandon,
You must intone the song.
Then I shall leap into love,
From love into knowledge,
From knowledge into enjoyment,
And from enjoyment beyond all human sensations.
There I want to remain, yet want also to circle higher still.*

-Mechthild of Magdeburg (1207 - 1297)