

**READING FROM THE GOSPELS: John 2:1-11**

*The First Miracle ... But Not the Last*

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The Rev. Tom Hagood

On my recent trip to Israel, I had the opportunity to drive through the town of Cana ... the place where Jesus, his mother and the disciples went to celebrate a wedding. Cana is just a few miles from Nazareth over the hills of Galilee.

However Cana today doesn't look anything like the Cana of Jesus' day. It has the same hustle and bustle appearance of any small modern city. But today, the majority of residents are Muslims ... not Jewish. However, there on one corner I spotted a store with a large red banner emblazoned with the words, "Cana Wedding Wine Souvenir Store: The First Miracle."

No one was turning water into wine ... but Muslim or not ... this was one way to turn water into shekels. But you really don't hear a lot about miracles anymore. That's kind of old fashioned. We tend to give science and technology the credit for miracles.

When a new discovery is made to cure some form of cancer, research scientists get the pats on the back. When a paralyzed person is able to walk again, it is because of the skilled hands of the surgeon and the dedication of the physical therapists.

Yet ... in the gospels ... we read over and over about miracles performed by Jesus Christ. So what's happened? Where did all the miracles go? Even the little ones? I think it would be neat to see water turned into wine, wouldn't you? So maybe I missed something.

Maybe there is something else Christ is trying to tell us in our reading this morning from the second chapter of John, verses 1-11. So let's listen together with our hearts and minds to the word of our Lord.

2:1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

2:2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

2:3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

2:4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."

2:5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

2:6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

2:7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

2:8 He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it.

2:9 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 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."

2:11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

This is the word of our Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts, be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Just a little miracle. It wouldn't be his last. But it really was just a little miracle. The kind you'd almost expect a magician to pull off ... so how'd he do it? How'd he switch that water with wine? Maybe he used mirrors. Maybe he covered those jars in a large black cape and then yanked it off saying the magic words: Presto changeo ... water into wine.

Or maybe the servants were in on it all along ... that'd make a neat joke to pull on their boss, now wouldn't it. "Did you see the look on his face when he tasted that wine?" But it wasn't a sleight of hand. There was no trickery. The servants saw it ... the disciples saw it ... though they had no idea how it happened. And believe me ... they were impressed.

Just a little miracle. And, in the Gospel of John ... it was the first miracle. I've always wondered. Do you think Jesus ever practiced ... you know, turning water into wine? Do you think he used to sneak out in the backyard and rehearse his miracles. Maybe he touched a dead bird one day and it flew off into the sky. "Wow ... that was neat. How'd that happen?"

But as he grew older ... I'm sure he began to realize that he really wasn't exactly like the other kids on the block. He had been set aside for something special ... and he knew it in his heart. As the gospel of Luke tells us ... "Jesus grew ... and became strong in spirit."

And there ... in Cana ... with a little prodding from his mother ... he performs his first miracle. Now some people have ignored that little miracle over the years. They don't like the implication that Jesus was a little ole' wine maker.

And there are plenty of good Baptist jokes about that wine ... what some pious Christians actually refer to as "water into grape juice."

But I believe ... that that little miracle ... there at a wedding in Cana ... actually tells us more about God's love for us than we might ever imagine. Because it was there that Jesus Christ poured overflowing grace into the lives of the people ... by doing just a little miracle ... his first miracle. And that miracle wasn't meant to be cheap trick.

Now everyone knows that water is the life-giving stuff of this world. After all ... you and I are made up of a whole lot of water ... all living things are. Water sustains us ... refreshes us ... revives us. But water is also one of the most powerful symbols of our faith.

The story of creation takes place as the breath of God blew over the waters that covered the world ... the Hebrews walked through the waters to escape the Egyptians ... and ... if you were here last week, Ann Clay Adams preached on the baptism of Christ ... in the waters of the Jordan River.

That event takes place in the gospel of John just before our reading today about a wedding in Cana. I don't think that was a coincidence. Because there ... in Cana ... Christ turns ordinary ... life-sustaining water ... into wine ... the very symbol of the cup of salvation on this table ... "this is the new covenant ... shed by my blood ... for the forgiveness of sin."

Just a little miracle ... but powerfully symbolic of the two sacraments we celebrate ... baptism and communion ... one grafts us into the body of Christ ... the other redeems and saves us through Christ.

Now there is no doubt that a lot of people at the wedding were quite excited that someone had found a few more jugs of wine. You see, sometimes those first-century Hebrew weddings would go on for two or three weeks. Now that's some kind of partying.

But to those who witnessed what Jesus had done that day ... particularly his disciples ... he was no longer just an extraordinary rabbi ... everything changed in that simple little miracle.

If you're going to begin a journey with a Savior ... if you're going to witness a miracle ... what better way than through the waters of baptism and the cup of salvation. And that miracle ... whether the disciples knew it or not ... pointed to Christ as the Messiah.

And you know what ... that's really what a miracle is. It is a sign that points to a revelation of something else. A miracle is anytime God's grace flows into our lives ... when we are blessed ... when we are comforted ... when we receive forgiveness or give forgiveness ... when we feed the hungry ... give a coat to someone who is cold ... stop on the road and tend to a wounded stranger ... those are all miracles ... some of them just little miracles ... but each and every one of them points to something else ... something much greater ... each one is a sign ... each and every one of them is a revelation that points to and reveals who Christ is in this world.

A miracle is God's way of building the Kingdom of Heaven ... here and now ... in this world.

I'd like to share a little miracle with you this morning. Not too far from here is an apartment complex ... the Sol Luna Park Apartments on Memorial Drive, a complex for low income families run by the Initiative for Affordable Housing.

The Initiative has two other apartment complexes for families and one for senior adults.

Though the residents at Sol Luna feel blessed to have a place to live, it is still very hard for many of the residents to make ends meet. Even though each family has someone who is employed, sometimes tough decisions have to be made ... “do I buy my medicine or do I buy the groceries?” I doubt many of us have ever been faced with that choice.

A little over a year ago, a seed was planted by the director of Initiative, Lisa Wise. She asked us here at Columbia and over at Midway and up the street at North Decatur Presbyterian if we would be interested in helping to start a food co-op at the Sol Luna.

I had never participated in a co-op. So a small team from our church along with the other churches headed over to Georgia Ave. Baptist Church to observe their long-running, well-established food co-op.

The concept is quite simple ... the members of the co-op make a small bi-weekly payment of about \$5 and in return they receive a load of food from the Atlanta Food Bank worth between \$50-\$60. The co-op members set up the tables and arrange the boxes ... they unload the food ... they distribute the food into the boxes ... and they even have time for some fellowship to get to know one another. And the result ... each family can make ends meet.

Just a little miracle ... pointing to something else. Well ... we were amazed at what we saw. And the idea was copied and brought back to Sol Luna. Initially, about 24 families were involved in the program ... and our own Bob Reardon would drive his truck out to the Atlanta Food Bank twice a month and bring back the food to be distributed to the 24 families each receiving a box of food twice a month. Twenty-four families making ends meet. Just another little miracle ... pointing to something else.

That was then ... now it has grown ... there are now two co-ops at the Sol Luna and a brand new one at an apartment complex just down the road. A total of 88 families ... 88 families in our own neck of the woods ... almost 300 people ... are now receiving food ... each able to make ends meet. And Bob ... well now he's driving that wonderful truck of his once a week to the Food Bank. It's just a little miracle ... pointing to something else.

So what is that little miracle pointing to ... that's right, Jesus Christ. It started with that first little miracle way back in Cana ... when the disciples saw and believed and followed Christ ... and those miracles haven't stopped yet.

Each little miracle is God's way of calling out to someone ... of leading someone ... each one points the way for someone to see and to follow Jesus Christ. From water into wine ... to families being fed ... small miracles are happening all around us ... and though you might not even be aware of it ... many of you are being used by Christ as a miracle to reveal the love and compassion and hope of our Savior ... and that my friends, is the true miracle.

So if someone asks me, “Do miracles still happen?” I tell them that there is no doubt in my mind that they still do ... I see them all the time here at Columbia Presbyterian ... I see them in the miraculous things you do through the life and mission of this church.

When you feed homeless families at Hagar's House ... when you volunteer with the children at Our House ... when you give your time and energy to the Hands On Atlanta project being led by David Hale ... which by the way continues this afternoon and tomorrow ... when you bring food to stock our own food pantry and the pantry at Decatur Emergency Assistance Ministry ... when you support the efforts of the Clifton Sanctuary Ministries ... when you show up each month to make sandwiches for the Central Shelter ... when you donate to the Pastor's Fund so that we can help people with emergency situations ... when you help make simple little Hygiene Kits for the Haitian people ... you are one of God's little miracles ... revealing the truth of God's reconciling love in the world.

After all, as someone once wrote, "Every believer is God's miracle." (Philip James Bailey, Christian Reader, Vol. 33, no. 2.) And if that is so ... than each one of us ... each one of us who has been baptized and tasted the cup of salvation ... is a revelation of Jesus Christ ... a sign pointing others along the way ... a sign that will lead to another little miracle.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.