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THE BRIDEGROOM'S GOOD WINE
John 2:1-11; Epiphany 2C; January 18-19, 2025

St. John described Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding at Cana as **“the first (or beginning) of His signs... and [Jesus] manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.”** What is so glorious about this sign of turning water into wine that it caused Jesus’ disciples to believe in Him? When we teach this story to little children it is enough for them to believe that Jesus could do this miracle because He is God’s Son, but there is something more than that going on here.

There is a deeper significance to Jesus turning water into wine than simply showing He is God and that He didn’t want the wedding celebration to end because they ran out of wine. When we go home from church, we should be able to understand how what Jesus did then applies to us now. Jesus’ sign of turning water into wine manifests His glory which leads to us believing in Him now and joining a celebration that will last forever.

Three details from the account are keys to our understanding: one, that Jesus filled jars with water typically used for purification rites by Jews; two, His water became wine; and, three, the Bridegroom kept the good and better wine for last.

Part One: Purification

Water is used for purification or cleaning. We are told to wash our hands with soap and water because germs on our hands can make us or others sick if germs get in our mouths, noses, or eyes. Water is used to wash away things that can hurt or even kill us. If water is going to clean filth off of us, the water itself has to be pure and clean. When cleaning something dirty, we start with fresh, clean water. After dipping the wash rag or mop into the bucket repeatedly, the water becomes dirty. We pour out that dirty water and start over with clean, otherwise we are just spreading the dirt around.

The stone jars Jesus told the servants to fill with water were used by the Jews in rites of purification in their homes. God had commanded that His people be purified and clean before coming near to Him.

Before making sacrifices for the sins of the people in the tabernacle or temple, priests first had to be cleansed themselves, washing with water and offering sacrifices for themselves. Ceremonial cleansing or purifying also went on in Jewish homes. The guests at the wedding at Cana would have used water from those stone jars to wash themselves before they came into the feast. They were asking God to be with them at the wedding feast and bless them, a little like when we pray before meals, “Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest.”

What made Jews impure, dirty and in need of cleansing? The same thing that makes us filthy before God: sin. God is holy and without sin, and nothing sinful can come near to God and live but will die. God sent Jesus to cleanse us from all sin and the death that results from sin. So, God sent John the Baptist to preach repentance of sin and a baptism with water in preparation for the coming Christ, the Messiah, Jesus. God in Christ was coming into the midst of His people who were unclean in sin, so they needed to be purified.

Last week we heard how John baptized Jesus in water, not to purify Jesus from sins – Jesus was sinless and holy – but to take our sins on Himself, to **take away the sin of the world**. The way God purifies us so we can come into His presence is to wash away our sin in Holy Baptism, the “washing of new birth in the Holy Spirit” (SC III.3). The Old Testament Jews used water for rites of purification; God uses the New Testament water of Holy Baptism to purify us of our sin. Baptism “works forgiveness of sins, rescues from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this.”

John the Baptist described his baptism as that of water, but when the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world came, “**He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit**” (Jn 1:33). Christian Baptism purifies us from all sin, and it also gives us the Holy Spirit.

The first point we can take home with us from Jesus’ sign of turning water into wine is that He used the stone jars with water for Jewish purification to show us that He came to purify us in the water of Holy Baptism. To emphasize this point, He turned the water into wine.

Part Two: Water into Wine

When the subject of wine comes up in the Church, our first thoughts usually go to the wine used in Holy Communion. And if that is where your mind went, good for you. At the same time, this part of John's Gospel is focused on Baptism, not the Lord's Supper. The cleansing water of baptism is John's focus here, not the wine that is Jesus' blood in the Lord's Supper. Both Baptism and the Lord's Supper connect us to the blood of the Lamb of God, the final Passover Lamb who died on the cross to save us from sin and death, who rose from the dead to give us life. But here, the focus is on the purifying and cleansing blood of Jesus in Holy Baptism.

Before he died in Egypt, Jacob blessed his 12 sons. The blessing he gave to Judah included the promise that kings would come from his line to rule over his brothers, that is, David; and from David's line a King who would rule forever: Jesus Christ. The prophecy says in part:

Binding His foal to the vine (the ruler in the line of Judah)
and His donkey's colt to the choice vine, (think: Palm Sunday)
He has washed His garments in wine
and His vesture in the blood of grapes (Gn 49:11). (Jesus' cross)

Baptism connects us to the cross of Jesus where blood and water poured out from His body, described in Jacob's blessing of Judah as "**wine, the blood of grapes.**" The wine Jesus made at the wedding at Cana points us to the His blood poured out in abundance on the cross to take away the sin of the whole world. John's First Epistle, states: "**the blood of Jesus [God's] Son cleanses us from all sin**" (1:7).

What we should take home from the sign of lots of water turned into lots of wine is that Jesus' blood, **wine, blood of grapes,** washes away lots of sin. This cleansing with His blood happens to us when baptized with water and the Spirit. The blood and water that poured from His pierced side after He died for us on the cross, cleanses us from all sin.

Part Three: The Bridegroom's Good Wine

When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good (better) wine until now."

John the Baptist, when questioned about who he was, had stated clearly that He was not the Christ, **the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie** (1:27). Someone greater than John was coming: Jesus, God's Son. With Jesus's coming, the old passed away and something new and better took its place. What John the Baptist was doing in preparation for the coming of the Christ was good, but what Jesus would do was better. John baptized with water, but Jesus baptizes with water and the Holy Spirit. John washed with water in the Jordan River, but Jesus washes us clean with His own blood on the cross. We have the good and better wine of Jesus' blood that washes away all our sin in Holy Baptism.

Later, when John's disciples were concerned that people were leaving him and following Jesus instead, he reminded his disciples: **"I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him.' The One who has the bride is the Bridegroom. The friend of the Bridegroom, who stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly at the Bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete"** (3:28-29).

Jesus is the Bridegroom and John His friend, the "best man" at His wedding. St. Paul, as he described holy matrimony in Ephesians five, built on this. **"Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, that He might sanctify her (make her holy with His own holiness), having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word (Baptism), so that He might present the church to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish"** (Eph 5:25-27). Jesus Christ is the Bridegroom, and the Church is His beautiful bride.

We have been given something new and better by being baptized into Christ. The old wine was good, but our Bridegroom's wine is better, and we know that what is best is yet to come.

What can we take home today from Jesus' sign of turning water into wine? It is about our purification. It is about the water of baptism and the blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all sin. It is about Jesus beginning something new and better as the Church's Bridegroom and we in the Church as His bride. He has provided enough wine for the wedding celebration to last forever. Amen.