

John is the fourth gospel. Significantly different than the other three (Matthew, Mark and Luke – often called the Synoptic Gospels). John tells the story of Jesus – the same story – with a different narrative evolution. Jesus doesn't climax in a final trip to Jerusalem, but rather his ministry progresses through travels there and back. John structures his story-telling around seven signs, or miracles, which tease out the theological themes of Jesus as the revelation of God.

Today's scripture is the first of the seven signs, the only one of which is unique to John, not occurring in any of the other gospel tellings. It occurs in the context of Mary telling the wedding waiters (and us as the reader) to "Do whatever Jesus tells you." When that happens, belief is found, and the glory of God made known.

As I read through the story I'm holding on to the first words spoken by Jesus in John's gospel which are "What are you looking for?" 1:38; the invitation to "Come and See." 1:39; and the second invitation to discipleship he gives in 1:43, "Follow me." The unfolding story and evolution of discipleship as a life-path jumps forward in this scripture, which concludes with the disciples putting their trust in Jesus, believing in him as the Messiah: the Way, the Truth and the Life.

wedding: weddings in that culture and time were different than what we imagine today. "The usual festivities consisted of a procession in which the bridegroom's friends brought the bride to the groom's house, and then was followed by a wedding supper; seemingly the festivities continued, lasting for seven days. This is hinted at in Judges 14:12; Tobit 11:19 and in the Mishnah (Kethuboth 1)." Some traditions stipulated the feast start on a Wednesday." *Brown p.97-98*

the mother of Jesus: the phrase sounds cold, maybe even misogynistic to us, but this was the common way of to women in that time and context: in relationship to the son(s) they had. Curiously in John the mother of Jesus is here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and also at the end, at the foot of the cross in John 19:25-27.

the wine gave out: Imagine how much wine would be needed for a feast lasting seven days. Running out of it would be a hugely awkward social situation. Some argue that the bridegroom didn't plan well, others that possibly Jesus and his friends were to fault for this lack. Tradition stated that guests were to bring gifts, in particular of wine, to the festivities. Jesus, and his disciples, embracing poverty, most likely brought nothing, yet participated in the feast. It's possible that their presence causes the lack of wine, which would have been a shame-inducing thing for the new couple. Why does Mary ask Jesus to do something? Is she asking him to do a miracle? Or is she merely repeating aloud the desperation of the situation? Her persistence seems to push Jesus to act. We also see that in Matthew 15:25-27 & John 4:47-50. Why does Jesus refuse her request?

Wine & Weddings: both abundant wine, and the wedding as a "feast" were often used in the 1st Testament to symbolize the days, time and joy of the Messiah. For example in Isaiah 54:4-8 : "Do not fear, for you will not be ashamed;... For your Maker is your husband... the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer... For the Lord has called you like a wife..." in Amos 9:13-14: "The time is surely coming, says the Lord, when ...the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel...they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine." Jesus also used them as a symbol of the messianic days in his parables, see Matthew 8:11, Luke 22:16-18, Matthew 22:1-14 "Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying: "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son...." It's also used by John in Revelation 19:9: "And the angel said..., "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." Does this also symbolize the wine of communion and Jesus as the bread of life come down from heaven to give life to the world so that none

SCRIPTURES FOR SUNDAY 1.14.2018

John 2:1-11

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

¹On 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

may hunger? See John 6:22-59. The first sign of Jesus involves creating an abundant amount of wine. His last action is to drink of the cup that the Father has given him in John 18:11. Wine, in abundance, and at a feast, brackets his actions.

Woman: When Jesus says this it's neither impolite, nor an angry rebuke, but rather his normal, polite way of addressing women which we see in Matthew 15:18;; Luke 13:12; and John 4:21; "Jesus said to [the Samaritan woman], "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem." John 8:10, 19:26 & 20:13.

My hour: This expression is used twelve times in John's retelling of the story, always representing the period of the passion, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus through with God the Father is revealed to the world.

SIX STONE WATER JARS: these would be used for ritual washing before eating and prayer. Jesus makes roughly 180 gallons of wine – an unexpected huge gift, a radical abundance, at a routine event.

THE GOOD WINE FIRST, AND THEN THE INFERIOR WINE AFTER: This statement calls to mind the similar saying found in the other three gospels about the radical transformation brought by the teachings of Jesus: "no one puts new wine into old wineskins... but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins." Matthew 9:14-17, Mark 2:21-22 & Luke 5:33-39.

the first of his signs: John uses the word "sign" instead of miracle. Whereas the later can seem like the end, as sign is a means, it points to something else – the Word made flesh in Jesus. His gospel contains seven of them: the 1st) here in 2:1-11; the 2nd) healing a child in John 4:46-54; the 3rd) curing the paralytic in 5:1-5; the 4th) multiplying the loaves of bread in 6:1-15; the 5th) walking upon the water in John 6:16-21; the 6th) curing a blind man in John 10; and the 7th) raising Lazarus from the dead in John 11. In these signs Jesus is presented as the replacement to the religious traditions, rites and the Temple. He is the revelation and way to God the Father.

Most scholars identify this particular narrative use of "signs" as the primary structuring element of the gospel, outlining it in 4 parts: 1. The Prologue (John 1:1-18); 2. The Book of Signs (John 1:19-7:50); 3. The Book of Glory (John 13:1-20:31) and 4. The Epilogue John 21:1-25.

revealed his glory: John insists throughout the gospel that the glory of Jesus won't be revealed until and through his passion. For example in John 12: 20-36 Jesus says "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit... "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—"Father, save me from this hour"? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour." Is John lifting up this story as a precursor to the passion of Christ?

his disciples believed in him: This encounter at the Cana wedding is presented as the culmination of the evolving discipleship of Philip, Nathanael, Peter and John who first beginning following Jesus as Master in John 1:37. It also is the fulfillment of the promise that Jesus made to them in John 1:50 "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these."

Much information comes from the exhaustive commentary by Raymond E. Brown on

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.

Questions for the practice of Examen & Contemplation

- What shimmers for you in this story of the Wedding at Cana?
- What word, phrase or image touches your life today?
- Of what is this story a sign? What do you see when you look at the story, wrestling with it on a literal, symbolic, narrative and emotional level?
- How does this story inform and shape your own story of following Jesus?
- What questions does this story breathe into you, and leave you with...about God?, about yourself?, about life?