

February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2026

## **John 2:1-11 “The Good News Catches Us by Surprise”**

There's a running joke among preachers that you should never teach people what you learned in seminary during the first three years of your ministry. Now some preachers chuckle, nod their heads, and say, "Ain't that the truth." Other preachers hear that joke and aren't amused at all. Probably because they tried to preach what they learned on day one... and became that church's unintentional interim. But it's true. What many of us learned in Sunday school gets challenged on the first day of seminary. Here's an example --

Our Sunday School understanding of the gospels is that four of Jesus' apostles followed him around with a notepad and wrote down what he said as he said it. Then they all got together later and said, "You know, we ought to put these stories together so that they can be gathered in one big volume along with all those letters that Paul wrote." One problem with that theory is that John and Matthew were the only two gospel writers who were apostles. Luke and Mark weren't even on the roster.

The reality is that these gospels weren't a product of one person writing an eyewitness account of Jesus' ministry. They emerged from different Christian communities throughout the Roman Empire out of oral tradition. Mark is the oldest and shortest of the gospels. Mark started at Jesus' baptism and barely took a breath until the resurrection. Luke and Matthew were written a bit later. They were both concerned about Jesus' birth story and Jesus' ascension after the resurrection. Luke took it a step further and wrote a second volume, what we now call Acts, and along the way the church placed John's gospel in between them.

So let's talk about John since that's one of the gospels we have in front of us today. This is the latest gospel we have in our Bibles. John wasn't interested in Jesus' birth. He was interested in the one who was "with God in the beginning, through whom all things were made." John isn't

as concerned with chronology as he is with meaning. But John is fun to read because of stories like the Wedding at Cana that Jean just read.

Whereas Matthew and Luke introduce Mary as part of Jesus' birth story, John introduces her at a party of all things! Matthew and Luke show us a young, vulnerable Mary who is told by angels that she would give birth to the messiah, John shows us a woman who is fussing at her son because the guests at a wedding drank all the wine. Luke introduces Mary with "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant." John introduces Mary with, "Jesus! They ran out of wine. Do something!" And Jesus says, "Mom! This isn't our problem! I'm not ready for miracles yet!" And does she say, "Oh I'm sorry honey, I overstepped." No, she calls the servants over and says, "Hey – do what he says!" And does Jesus say, "Ma, please! Didn't you just hear what I said? I'm ... not ... ready! I just got baptized four days ago, and I've only had disciples for three days! And there are only four of them! I need some more prep time here!" No. He did what any good Jewish son would do -- he did what she said. And so begins the story of Jesus' public ministry as presented in the Gospel of John.

The word gospel means "good news." So what's the good news in this story? Well, for me it's the surprise of it all. John's gospel hits us with a potentially embarrassing squabble with one's mother in front of a crowd of friends. That is such a *human* experience. It gives life to the moment. There's something so *real* about this situation and it leaves room for some fun speculation. Maybe this whole scene was some sort of setup for what happened. Something that both mother and son knew ahead of time.

The good news, in this case, is that it catches us off guard. However this conversation goes down—sassy or sincere—I picture Mary, unblinking at Jesus' insistence that his hour has not yet come. She turns to the crowd of befuddled waitstaff as she saunters off with: "Do whatever he tells you!" Mary has complete trust in the miracle to come. The servants

turn to look at Jesus—hopeful, skeptical, bewildered—and Jesus tells them to fill six stone water jars, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. And they filled them up to the brim. Here’s something people don’t often think about – One hundred and twenty gallons of wine is equal to *one thousand* of what we measure as bottles of wine! The party goes from being good to being *unforgettable*.

Behold: Jesus’ debut miracle. It’s not a healing. It’s not an exorcism. It’s not walking on water or raising the dead. Jesus’ first act is to help ensure a party becomes the best party possible. It’s a total surprise. Because this... this is who Jesus is. Jesus doesn’t have to begin with defeating evil because he knows ultimately evil doesn’t stand a chance against a God who loves a good party and his mother. Evil is predictable. Scarcity is predictable. Fear is predictable. But our God *loves* a surprise.

Okay, you know that it wouldn’t be Lent if I didn’t leave you with some questions to ponder this coming week –

The Wedding at Cana contains many unanswered questions. Why are Jesus and his newly-appointed disciples hanging out at a wedding in the first place? Is this a family affair, a favor to his mother before Jesus departs from Galilee? Why do you think John’s Gospel highlights this miracle as the start of Jesus’ ministry? What does this say about the good news of Jesus according to John’s Gospel?

Running out of wine could be seen as a major social faux pas, reflecting poorly on the host of the party and the wedded couple’s families. Who would have been blamed or punished for the wine running out? Could this be part of why Jesus turns the water into wine, in order to protect any servants who would be scolded?

Under Mosaic Law, the water jars were used for ritual cleansing before a meal. This wasn’t drinking water. Why does Jesus use these vessels for a miracle of abundance to provide more joy rather than to cleanse or absolve? How does this set the tone for his ministry?

Those are your questions to ponder this week. Here's what I want you to take home today. The good news still catches us by surprise. We live in a world that trains us to expect scarcity. Not enough time. Not enough money. Not enough hope. Not enough goodness to go around. The headlines preach a gospel of running out. But John tells us that when the wine runs out... Jesus doesn't scold. He doesn't ration. He doesn't calculate. He overflows. One hundred and twenty gallons of "more than enough."

Consider who witnesses this miracle of abundance: the servants. The servants are the only ones who actually see it happen. The master of ceremonies doesn't know where the wine came from. The guests don't know. The bride and groom probably don't even know! But the servants do. The ones who filled the jars to the brim. The ones who carried the heavy water. The ones who trusted Mary's strange instruction: "Do whatever he tells you."

That's where I want to leave you. This week, when it feels like something has run out — patience, courage, joy, certainty — listen for that quiet nudge: "Do whatever he tells you." Fill the jars. Make the call. Offer the forgiveness. Extend the invitation. Show up to the celebration. Protect the vulnerable. Choose generosity when scarcity feels safer. You may not see the miracle right away. You may not get the credit. But somewhere between obedience and overflow, the good news will surprise you. Because that's just who God is.

A God who refuses to let empty jars define the story.  
A God who begins the work of salvation not with fear, but with joy.  
A God whose first public act is to keep the party going.  
So this Lent, don't just prepare for the cross.  
Watch for the wine.