

THE WEDDING CRASHER

Text: John 2:1-11
LHUMC 1/20/13

I. Introduction

- A. Back when I used to teach middle school English, I used to tell the students that when they wrote a short story, the beginning of the story is the most important part. With your beginning, you either catch the reader's attention or you turn them off to the rest of the story.
 - 1. Based on that, I've always thought that John has kind of a strange way of starting a story.
 - 2. I'm not sure what kind of grade I'd give him, to be honest.
- B. A couple of weeks ago, we saw it first hand when we read those first verses of his whole book
 - 1. Remember that Christmas story that wasn't really a Christmas story?
 - 2. His beginning in which rather than having all these wonderful characters of Christmas that we could relate to, instead had hard-to-understand stuff like the Word that was with God, etc.
- C. Today we get another sort of strange beginning to another story, his story of Jesus' adult ministry.
- D. Not to say that the story we just saw isn't a good story, it's just not what we might expect. Put it this way:
 - 1. Given all the spectacularly public things that Jesus did—healing people, walking on water, telling those great parables, and this is what John gives us first?
 - 2. Jesus at a wedding, or actually, Jesus at a party after a wedding? And we all know what those can be like sometimes! And back then, wedding parties could last up to a week—that's some party!
 - 3. And changing water into wine? Is that it?
 - 4. We ask ourselves wouldn't the world have been the same if Jesus hadn't been there that day?
 - 5. Or when Mary asked him to bail out the host who apparently hadn't planned the whole wine supply thing very well, he'd said "I've got bigger fish to fry", would it really have mattered all that much? So they ran out of wine—big deal!
 - 6. And what if we didn't know the rest of the story?
 - 7. What if we read the story of Jesus only up to that point? What would it tell us about Jesus?

- a) I guess that it wasn't beneath him to go to a neighborhood party, if nothing else.
- 8. If that's all we knew about him and his life, would we even care about knowing more about him?
- 9. Okay, so his first miracle, his first "sign" as John calls it, takes place simply so a party doesn't poop out. So what?
- 10. And even if we'd been there, it would have been that way. I always wonder if most of the guests even knew what was going on. When they all of sudden got the good wine, did they just think that someone had just made a run to Ladd's?
- 11. It just seems so ordinary and everyday.
- 12. Which in the case of the story of the Messiah, God's eternal Son come down to earth, the Word made flesh, seems like a strange way to begin a story.

II. But maybe that's the point. Maybe if you start a story of someone who came into the world to change the world with a kind of small story, with a small miracle, there is something there for us. Maybe John had his reasons for starting with this story (a story which none of the other gospel writers thought was important enough to be a part of their gospels).

- A. Maybe it was about helping us to understand that Jesus has a way of showing up in our everyday kind of times and places.
 - 1. Which raises the question—does Jesus show up at our parties? Does Jesus the wedding crasher still break into those kinds of times?
 - a) I have to believe that Jesus was at our wedding—we'd met at church, in youth group, in bell choir. The reception was in the church basement—he had to be there, right?
 - b) I have to believe that Jesus is there any time there's a celebration in our family—at the Christmas or Thanksgiving dinners, at birthday parties, etc.
 - c) And it's not just at the celebrations—John is also the only one of the gospel writers to tell a story a little later about when Jesus goes to Bethany to the home of Mary and Martha. They have a brother named Lazarus who has died. And John tells of how Jesus becomes a part of a different kind of party—when people have gathered to comfort Mary and Martha on their loss. And of course he performs another miracle—raising Lazarus from death. But the setting into which he comes, into which he acts, is just as everyday and intimate as that wedding party scene in Cana of Galilee.

2. So I'm wondering if maybe intimacy is the key to John's choice of stories. When you start with a neighborhood party, it's all about intimacy.
 - a) In Jesus, John gives us one who is with us at the most intimate times of our lives.
 - b) Whether the mood is celebratory or somber, Jesus has a way of breaking into those times and places. Of making his presence known amidst our friends and families and communities.
 - c) A favorite phrase of John's is that Jesus "abides" with us. To "abide" means literally to "be at one with".
 - d) He's talking about this intimate relationship that Jesus wants to have with us, a relationship that is there even or especially in our everyday events.
 - e) I know I talk a lot about the need that we have in our lives as Christians to always be seeking out Jesus. John may be reminding us by making this story first that even before we are seeking him, he is not only seeking us out, but he is finding us, not just here at church, but even at our wedding parties.
- B. So if today's story says a lot about Jesus because of where Jesus tends to show up, it says even more about what he can do when he gets there. Two things:
 1. First, don't get too literal with the whole "water into wine" thing.
 - a) See it instead as something ordinary that gets turned into something extraordinary. When you do that, you begin to realize that Jesus can turn our water into wine as well.
 1. When you begin to understand that, you understand that Jesus has the power to turn the ordinary into the extraordinary in so many ways for us too.
 - a) For Jesus changes water into wine anytime he turns our sadness into joy.
 - b) He changes water into wine anytime he turns our grief into hope.
 - c) He changes water into wine anytime he changes our anger into forgiveness.
 - d) He changes water into wine any time he turns the expected into the unexpected.
 - e) He changes water into wine anytime he turns our cynicism into optimism.
 - f) He changes water into wine anytime he turns our simplicity into extravagance.

- g) He changes our water into wine anytime he turns our scarcity into abundance.
 - h) And on and on it goes.
 - i) How has Jesus changed water into wine for you? I think it's happened to all of us at one time or another, even in the day-to-day events of our lives or we wouldn't be here today.
2. The other thing is that this story is all about abundance. What we forget sometimes is exactly how much good, new wine we're talking about here. Given the number of jugs and how big they probably were, scholars say it could have been up to 180 gallons of wine that Jesus brought into being. However much, suffice to say it was way more than all those people at the party could have drunk and lived to tell about it, at least.
- a) Which just goes to show that even when Jesus breaks into small, everyday, intimate kind of places, he can do more than we could ever imagine.
 - b) When we worry like that father of the bride that there's never going to be enough, Jesus has a way replenishing our reserves, so to speak, even if it is simply in giving us the internal strength to carry on.
 - c) Or maybe that new wine is simply a symbol for the abundance of grace that Jesus offers us—maybe we are talking about 180 gallons of grace here. How abundant is that?
 - d) One commentator sums it all up like this: “There is no cautious, careful restraint in this story. Jesus just shows up at the party and there is this miraculous effervescence of glory. If we have trouble with this story, it's not because we are so modern and sophisticated and scientific, but because we are so careful, cautious, and restrained. We don't make big moves in life. We don't ask big things of God. We keep our faith to ourselves, safely tucked away in the confines of our church...But what if our faith, our belief, our love for God is a gift of God and not our achievement? What if God is there, wanting to give us more faith, more love, more energy to meet the demands of discipleship? In short, what if this story is true? Jesus comes to a party in Cana, out in

Galilee. When the wine gives out, he tells them to fill up the large stone jars with water. When they do, the water is turned into wine, lots and lots of wine, more wine than anybody could possibly need to have a good party! What if we see this story as a story of abundance, a promise that God will give us what we need to be faithful, resourceful disciples? (William Willimon, *Pulpit Resource*, January-March 2007, p. 10)

III. Conclusion

- A. So if that's what it's really about, by putting this story first, is John trying to tell us that what Jesus wants more than anything is to turn our water into wine and to do so abundantly?
- B. If that's the case, what exactly is that wine that is now in your stone jar?
- C. How has Jesus turned some part of your life from scarcity to abundance?
- D. What has Jesus given you that you need to be more abundant in your love for him, to be more abundant in sharing whatever that wine is with others?
- E. Today we give thanks that Jesus keeps on crashing our wedding parties. That even in the everyday kind of events in our lives, Jesus keeps showing up, Jesus keeps seeking us out.
- F. And when he gets there, we give thanks that he keeps on changing our water into wine, and doing so abundantly.

O God, today we give thanks for the signs that you continually send into our lives. We thank you for Jesus, who is your ultimate and eternal sign. We are grateful that as Jesus took part in a party long ago, he still is present with us in our day-to-day gatherings, and that is desire for us is to know and experience his abundance. And more than that, help us to celebrate that you still seek us out in whatever is going on in our lives, and it is at those times that if we are open and discerning, we can experience your signs.

O God, on this weekend we also remember the witness of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Help us to remember his call for equality among all people, and how that resonates with Jesus' message and his vision of your kingdom here on earth. And even though we know that as a country and community we have come a long way, there is still much work to be done to bring about true equality and justice, and that all efforts begin with us as followers of Christ. These things we pray in the name of the him who is our sign, who loves all people abundantly, and who taught us to pray together: