

## The Frivolous Miracle

LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church

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John 2:1-12

I already said this is the first miracle in the gospel of John; I would also say that this miracle is different than any other miracle in the gospel of John. I don't know if you feel this too, but from the time I was young this miracle felt different – it's not like any of the other miracles in John; it's not like any of the miracles in other gospels.

What's different about it? Well, to be honest, it seems a little light. This miracle doesn't seem like it has the same weight as the others. In his other miracles Jesus takes on real pain and darkness and misery. A paralyzed man is unable to walk, he's stuck in his bed, he's stuck in poverty. That's real human suffering. Jesus says, "take up your bed and walk," and he's cured. That's a weighty miracle. A father comes to Jesus and says, please help my son! He's possessed by an evil spirit, and he throws himself on the ground. I can't control him! Jesus has mercy on the family and casts out the evil spirit. Jesus stands by the graveside of his dear friend Lazarus. All around him his friends are weeping – they feel death's sting. Jesus turns towards the grave and in a loud voice he cries, "Lazarus! Come out!" And he does. That's weighty. In every other miracle Jesus combats serious illness, serious danger, serious darkness.

But honestly, how serious is the problem in our passage. They're out of wine at a wedding. I mean, that's not great, right? We are planning for the wedding of our third child coming up in November and when you plan a wedding, you want everything to go well. You want everyone to have a good time. And as part of that, you want to make sure everyone has enough food and drink! So, running out of wine before the party's over is sub-optimal. I'm sure the hosts were mortified. But hey, it's not like the guests had been completely deprived. If the wine is already gone, it's safe to assume that the guests had already filled their glasses a few times. They'd all had their share. And if the lack of wine caused the party to come to an end a little earlier than expected, is that the end of the world? The couple would still be married. No one is in danger here. This isn't like blindness or demon possession. There is no other miracle in any of the gospels like this.

And not only is this miracle different, it's the first one! In the gospel of John, Jesus puts it out front! It's the first act of his glory and power. Why does Jesus start with this unusual miracle? I think there is something lovely and hopeful at the bottom of that question. I think Jesus does this very intentionally. I think Jesus is showing us something.

And to get at this something we have to see the long sweep of John. This miracle is the beginning of Jesus' work in John, what comes at the end? What is the last Bible book that comes from John's tradition? The book of Revelation. The gospel of John starts with a miracle at a wedding, what does the book of Revelation show us at the end? A wedding. Revelation 19:5-9 is a picture of the wedding supper of the Lamb. John sees a vision of the end of all things, and he sees God's people gathered at a wedding feast. Jesus is the groom; the church is the bride. The church is dressed in fine linen bright and clean. Christ is united with his people. All tears are gone; all struggles are over and there is a great feast. An angel cries out, "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the lamb!" Revelation 19 is a picture of the end of our journey, the end of our travelling. It's a picture of a joyful wedding feast, and everyone who belongs to Jesus is invited.

When you see that picture at the end, all of a sudden, you begin to understand why Jesus might have started with this miracle. When you see the wedding at the end, you might understand why Jesus would start his ministry with rescuing a wedding. This miracle is a foreshadowing. This wedding at the beginning is a foreshadowing of the wedding at the end. The miracle at this wedding and the joy that it creates in Cana in some obscure corner of Galilee is a foreshadowing of the joy which will fill the earth at the wedding supper of the lamb.

Why would Jesus want to start with this foreshadowing? Why would Jesus want to start by giving his disciples a foretaste of the joyful feast at the end?? Because soon enough the disciples will be down in the trenches. I just said all the other miracles of Jesus addressed real darkness and opposition. So, for the rest of their time with Jesus the disciples will be faced with opposition, and demons, and sickness and loss. For the rest of their journey with Jesus the disciples will be facing fear and uncertainty and danger. In the very next story, Jesus will be turning over tables in the temple courts while the Pharisees yell at him. The rest of their time with Jesus will be hard and fearful.

But before all that comes, before they go down into the valley of struggle, Jesus lifts them up so that they can see the joy at the end. Before they taste the bitterness of loss, Jesus gives them a taste of everlasting joy that will be theirs when they finally get home. This miracle is like a seed of hope in them that will help carry them through the other stuff. I think that's what it means in verse 11 when it says, "What Jesus did here at Cana was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him." What they see at this miracle will help carry them through a lot of hard times.

This miracle is not frivolous. It is the opposite of frivolous. This miracle is serious business. Serious business. Do you remember what C.S. Lewis said? He said joy is the serious business of heaven. When this life is over and we are united with Jesus, and our tears are washed away, and our struggle is done, we will be united with God and with each other in an eternity of joy. And this joy is not frivolous; it is the center of God's purposes for his world.

Can you see that this is the same thing that happens to us every time we celebrate communion? What Jesus does for his disciples here at Cana at the beginning of his journey with them, Jesus does for us at this table at the beginning of our week. This is the beginning of our week. Sunday is the first day of the week, not Monday! The world of work and profit and productivity wants you to think of Monday as the beginning of your week; it's not, Sunday is the first day of the week. If you don't believe me look at any calendar.

So here today, at the beginning of our week, we are invited to this table. We are invited to this feast, and just like the wedding feast in our passage, this feast is also a foretaste of the great wedding supper of the Lamb. As the liturgy says, here at this table we are lifted up and brought forwards to the end where we join the saints and angels to celebrate Jesus. Just like the disciples we get a taste of the joy that will be ours when we finally get home.

And we need that vision of the end because tomorrow is Monday. And when Monday comes, we will be in a very different environment. We will face dark and fearful things. Some of us will face an appointment with our oncologist to see what options we have to fight the cancer that has invaded our body. Some of us will face relationship stress in our family – days and nights wondering how things got so strained with these people we love and how we can make it better. Some of us will face chronic pain – pain that makes it hard for you to think about anything else. Some of you will be spending time in a hospice facility, walking through the valley of the shadow of death. But these things do not define us, these things do not rule our spirit, because here today Jesus lifts you up above all that and gives you a foretaste of the end. Here at this table, you won't just hear but you will actually taste that the end of your story is not pain and loss and conflict and death. The end of your story is life and laughter and fellowship and joy that will never end. It's what we need to keep us joyful and hopeful in the face of all these things.

That's how communion has always functioned for God's people. This week I came across the story of Francis-Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan. In the early 70's, during the Vietnam war, Van Thuan was the archbishop of the Catholic Church of South Vietnam. In 1975, when the South fell, Archbishop Van Thuan was arrested and sent to a re-education camp. He spent 13 years in that camp, nine of them in solitary confinement.

How does a man survive 9 years in solitary confinement? For Van Thuan his survival came through God's provision to him in the Lord's Supper. Early on in his captivity, he would write to friends on the outside and ask that they would send him his "medicine." And so, to get past the guards, they would send him communion wine in cough syrup bottles marked as medicine for stomach. In addition to the wine, Van Thuan squirreled away bread. So, every day at 3 pm, the time of Jesus' death, he would take out a few crumbs of

bread and put them in his palm, he would take a couple of drops of the wine and put it in the same palm, then he would say the words of the Lord's Supper liturgy, and he would eat the sacrament from his own palm. He did this for all 9 years he was in solitary confinement. During the 4 years he was in regular confinement, he would hold secret communion services with other prisoners in the re-education camp.

This camp was designed to break the spirit of the prisoners. This camp was designed to re-educate the prisoners, to turn them away from faith. It didn't work for Father Van Thuan because every day, he tasted the hope of communion, every day the Holy Spirit would lift him up so that he was no longer confined to his prison cell, instead he was at the table of the great wedding supper of the Lamb. He would remember that the end of his life was not the cruelty and unbelief of this place, his end was everlasting joy at the table of the King. You see, when you start at this table, when you start with the food of the gospel, it's hard for the darkness to break your spirit.

Maybe you think this is some dramatic and heroic story, far removed from your life. But it's not. The same miracle happens here in our congregation every week. In his visits, Chad mainly goes out and visits shut-ins, that is, people who, for one reason or another, can't make it to church anymore. They are not in a prison camp, but they are confined by their pain, by the diminishment of their body and their mind. Their world has shrunk. The walls have closed in. But Chad visits them and often, as part of those visits, he gives them communion. And when they taste the bread and the wine, their shrunken world is suddenly enlarged. It is as if the walls of their room fall away and the ceiling is rolled back and they are lifted beyond the confines of their weakness and seated at the wedding supper of the Lamb. They are not shut-ins anymore; they join all the saints and angels at the table of the King. And just as surely as Van Thuan's food gave him strength to keep going in his prison camp, this good food gives them strength for their journey too. You see...the miracle happens all the time.

You are not in a prison camp, and you are not shut-ins, but you have stuff. So, at the beginning of your week, before you go out there, before you deal with your stuff, come to the wedding supper of the Lamb. Let the confining walls of your world fall away, let the ceiling be rolled back like a scroll, and let yourself be lifted up to the table of your King. Because whatever you are facing out there, this is the end of your story, this is your home.

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