

Streetsville United Church

Sunday, January 20, 2019

Rev. John Tapscott

## “WHEN JESUS WAS INVITED TO A WEDDING”

John 2:1-11

It is one of the best known passages in Scripture. Three days after Jesus called some disciples to follow him, and Nathanael confessed Jesus as the Son of God, there was a wedding in Cana, not far from Nazareth. Mary, Jesus' mother, was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. At some point in the wedding reception the wine ran out. Jesus' mother told him, "They have no wine." Jesus gave her what seems to be a sharp answer, "Woman, what concern is that to you and me. My hour has not yet come." Jesus was saying something like, "I came to do more than solve the lack of wine at a wedding. The hour for my greatest work is still in the future." Furthermore, Jesus was saying that as much as he loved and cared for his mother he took directions from his Heavenly Father. He always had. You remember that incident we read a couple of weeks ago when 12-year-old Jesus told Mary and Joseph that he must be in the Father's house? Jesus' first priority was doing his Father's will.

But Mary trusted that he would and could do something. So she said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." And Jesus did something, not because Mary told him, but because he heard the Father's voice. And Jesus was about to do the first of his signs, signs which revealed his glory; and his disciples and perhaps a few others there at the wedding believed in him.

Jesus told the steward to fill the large stone jars with water. He told them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." When the steward tasted the water become wine, he didn't realize what Jesus had done. So he called the bridegroom, "Hey, what's going on here? You're supposed to serve the best wine first, and the inferior wine when the guests have drunk too much. But you're turned it upside down. You've saved the good wine until the end."

Now this story from John's Gospel has become good for a laugh or two. An African theologian comments on this story and says, 'In parts of Africa, it is not uncommon to see drunken people staggering along the road, despite the risk of being hit by vehicles. When told that drinking will ruin them, some quickly reply, "But Jesus made wine in Cana!"'

And then there was the Baptist preacher who was caught with a load of moonshine whiskey. He claimed he was just hauling water. When the police officer confronted him with the fact that it was not water but whisky, he exclaimed, "It's a miracle. Our blessed Lord has done it again."

But there are some serious lessons to be gleaned from the day when Jesus was invited to a wedding. I am going to make them easily memorable.

*First, Jesus rescues us.*

Now at every wedding back then or now, something is bound to go wrong, it seems. Everyone wants a wedding to be perfect, but it rarely is. Usually something unpredictable happens, something which guests can laugh at, remember and talk about. It's usually not too serious.

This didn't happen to me, but to one minister I know. He said that at one wedding ceremony when he asked the groom to kiss the bride, the groom leaned over to kiss him, the minister. The minister could never tell it without going red in the face. But there's always some little glitch at a wedding the guests are usually very understanding.

But there was one error in a Middle Eastern wedding that was nearly unforgivable. Hospitality in the Middle East was essential and to run low on food and drink at a wedding reception was a major embarrassment for the bride and groom and their families. This oversight would have been talked about for a long time to come.

But Jesus rescued the couple and their families from humiliation. By transforming the water into wine he saved the situation. He provided more than enough wine for the party to continue well into the night and even for the next few days.

Jesus Christ is the great rescuer. Do you recall that situation in Thailand last year when those young boys and their soccer coach were dramatically rescued from the flooded caves? The world watched with baited breath for days as a plan was carefully worked out and put in place. The rescuers took a considerable risk. And then we watched in wonder as one-by-one the boys emerged from the dark, flooded caves to safety. It was a magnificent, wondrous rescue.

Jesus Christ came to earth to bring about an even more dramatic rescue. We humans were trapped by the darkness of evil and sin and death. This darkness has the power to separate us from God in time and eternity. We were bound for eternal death, perishing. But God loves us very, very much and does not want that to happen. And he had a great plan to save us from our plight. At Bethlehem, God's Son took on our flesh. He entered our cave of darkness and provided a dramatic rescue by his atoning death on the cross. He took the plunge and suffered in our place, the sinless one for sinners. Then on the third day, the greatest of all signs occurred when the Father raised his Son from the dead to live forevermore as Saviour and Lord of all.

And now all of us who take hold of Christ by faith are led by him from darkness to light. There is now no condemnation for us who are in Christ Jesus. We have been rescued from the ultimate power of sin and death. We are the children of God forever, forgiven and free, heirs of eternal life. We will not be humiliated or ashamed or cast aside when we stand before God on the day of judgement. Instead, we will be welcomed by God into the joy of everlasting life. Nothing in life, in death, or in life beyond death can separate us from God's love in Christ Jesus our Lord. Jesus Christ has rescued us. We ought to be very grateful and live daily in the wonder and freedom of his gracious, saving act.

And even now Jesus rescues us. I can't tell you how many times I have been humiliated and shamed by my own sinful thoughts and actions, by the times I have done something foolish, by the times I have overlooked someone or something. But thankfully, a gracious nail-pierced hand

has reached out in my direction to rescue me from my disobedience and stupidity. That hand is the hand of the Saviour. He shows me mercy, cleanses me by his blood, and lifts me up to face a new day. I don't know how I could live apart from the rescuing mercy of Jesus Christ. It's my daily bread. And I'm sure it's the same for you.

When Jesus was invited to a wedding he rescued the situation. And Jesus Christ rescues us.

Here's the second truth. *Jesus Christ transforms us.*

Here we take water for granted but in the Middle East water is very precious. Those large jars filled with water show how seriously the Jewish people took the purification laws, washing hands thoroughly before eating. Such washing was also a sign of cleansing themselves before God.

At the wedding Jesus transformed precious water into even more precious wine, at least for the occasion. Jesus Christ transforms us, too. He is at work in all of us who believe in him. Yes, God loves us more than we can tell and gave his Son to die for us. So Christ saves us by grace through faith in him, yes. But when Christ comes into our lives and rescues us, he does not leave us as we are. He starts a good work in us. He begins to transform us into children of God who reflect the image of Christ. Jesus Christ brings new joy and hope into our lives. Life takes on a new and better quality when it is lived under the influence of Jesus Christ. He transforms us.

The transforming power of God is in Jesus Christ. Jesus transforms marriages and homes when he is invited in. As one former alcoholic said, "I don't know how Jesus turned water into wine, but I know that in my home he transformed whiskey into food and furniture." Jesus Christ transforms churches. Sometimes a church needs to be transformed from a place of complacency into a lively place which offers the living bread of the Gospel through word and deed, a church which is attractive to people who come through the doors and helps them experience the grace and presence of Christ. Are there parts of our church life that need to be transformed by Jesus? The transformation of a church happens because it happens first in the lives of God's people, us.

The transforming power of God in Christ is active in the world right now. The living Christ is transforming places of darkness into places of light; places of despair into places of hope; places of want into places of plenty. And his transforming work is happening through people like us, who are being transformed into his likeness. We are faithful servants who do what he tells us. One day the Risen Christ will return in glory and finally transform the whole creation so that it becomes the Kingdom of God, a new heaven and new earth. When Jesus was invited to a wedding, he transformed ordinary water into good wine. And Jesus transforms us, too. He is doing it now.

*Finally, because of Jesus, the best is yet to come.*

The steward said to Jesus, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine...but you have kept the good wine until now."

Because of Jesus the best is always yet to come. Sometimes as we grow older we become discouraged and think that life has passed us by. Certainly we may not be able to do what we

used to do, or even do what we want to do. But even still, the best is yet to come. Because of Jesus' life, death and resurrection, we look to the future with hope. It's not just a matter of living our lives, then dying and decaying. Life in Christ is a matter of continual transformation here, and then beyond death eternal life in God's nearer presence with all his redeemed people.

Please don't get fooled by that little joke people say when they suffer aches and pains which remind us of our human mortality. "Well, it's not great," they say, "but it's better than the alternative." That statement actually denies the great hope we hold. For Christians the alternative to death is more life, eternal life in the Father's house. Because of Christ, the best is always yet to come. Paul tells us that "the sufferings of this present age are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." And further, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

The theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said this when the Gestapo led him away to be hanged. "This is the end; for me the beginning of life." That is our Christian faith, our glorious hope, rooted in the promise of Scripture, and in the resurrection of Christ. Because he lives we shall live also.

"You have kept the good wine until now," said the steward. Because of Jesus the best is yet to come.

So here are three great truths for us from the day Jesus was invited to a wedding. First, Jesus rescues us. Secondly, Jesus transforms us. Finally, because of Jesus, the best of yet to come. Thanks be to God.