

**Celebration**  
**Isaiah 62:1-5, John 2:1-11**  
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Weddings are a lot of fun. A whole bunch of people gather together to celebrate two people making commitments to each other for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer. There's food and drink, flowers and decorations, music and dancing, laughter and merriment and fun. And in the middle of all of that, there's someone like me, whose only job is to remind everyone that the fun is not going to last; weddings are not the same as marriages; marriages take hard work and sacrifice, forgiveness and forbearance, so have your fun, enjoy the party today, but tomorrow you have to get to work. I belong to a noble guild of professional spoilsports, people who see a big party going on and think, you know what this event needs? A twenty minute lecture about Paul's letter to the Colossians. And of course, we have a point. Spoilsports usually do. Marriages *are* hard – spending your entire life with another human being is difficult, because two human beings will inevitably have different desires and priorities, different reactions to stress and ways of dealing with challenges, and if you haven't figured out some way of communicating through these difficulties before the inevitable crisis hits, you might be in trouble. So yes, it's not a terrible idea to interrupt the celebration with a warning that marriage is hard and trouble is on the way.

But it is interesting to note that Jesus didn't do that. The one occasion we know of when Jesus attended a wedding, he was not the spoilsport. He

didn't launch into one of his famous sermons about faithfulness and forgiveness and turning the other cheek. He didn't corner a few guests at the reception and bombard them with parables. When Jesus attended a wedding, he didn't think people needed a lecture. He thought they needed more wine. Jesus, the everlasting Son of God, creator of the universe, Alpha and Omega, the first and the last, Jesus Christ decides to use the awesome power of Almighty God to take over catering duties at the ballroom in the Cana Holiday Inn. And it's not just a little wine, either. This is not a single bottle of reasonably priced red. Jesus' wedding gift to the happy couple is around 180 gallons – more than four bathtubs full – of the best wine the steward has ever tasted. And that is not what you would expect, right? Based on everything you know about Jesus' representatives on earth, you would not think that "they're out of wine" is the most pressing problem that we would want Jesus to address. This story of the wedding at Cana forces us to seriously re-examine the potential answers to that famous question, What Would Jesus Do?, because it turns out "a run to the liquor store" is not out of the question.

So what is actually going on here? Why does this story, this strange story of Jesus providing wine to a wedding that has suddenly run dry, why does this story make it into the gospels? And not just anywhere, but as the first miracle Jesus performs in the gospel of John, a miracle that serves to introduce Jesus to John's readers and to the world. We look back on this story through the lens of two thousand years of church history, and for most of that time, the church has had a position of authority in western society.

We've appointed ourselves as the world's moral authority, and we've considered it our job to warn people of the dangers of alcohol use and abuse, preaching against drunkenness and all the social ills that overindulgence and addiction can cause. And all of that is true, and important and worthwhile, but we can forget that reminding people about the rules for living, the best practices for navigating their way through the difficult challenges of daily life, this isn't our primary purpose. Jesus didn't come into the world to tell us what we're doing wrong and what we need to do to fix it – he didn't come to lecture and nag. Jesus came so that we would have life – abundant life – so that our joy might be full. A life following Jesus is supposed to be a joyful life, a life filled with fun and excitement and merriment and celebration. And so when Jesus begins his ministry in the gospel of John, the first time he displays his power to change the world around isn't to cast out evil or heal the sick or feed the hungry, as important and good as all of that is. The first thing Jesus does is to bring a little more joy to a wedding, to make a celebration a little more celebratory. No doubt Jesus knew that that like all marriages, that couple would have days of stress and days of trouble, days where they just couldn't get along, but that's not the whole story of any marriage. There will also be days of joy, days of celebration, days of fun and merriment and laughter and even a little bit of wine. Jesus blessed that wedding with wine because life isn't only about hard work and duty, it's also about joy. It starts with joy.

And it's important for us to remember that, because over and over again, the Bible describes the relationship between God and humanity as

being like a marriage. First God's relationship with the people of Israel, and later God's relationship with the church, they are depicted as a relationship between a faithful, loving husband and his cherished, beloved bride. You can see that in the passage we read from the book of Isaiah – God says to Jerusalem, “your new name will be The city of God's delight, and the Bride of God, for God delights in you and will claim you as his bride – God will rejoice over you as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.” God's love for humanity is described as this passionate, faithful, unending love. Like a lovestruck groom seeing his bride coming down the aisle towards him, God declares that he is head-over-heels, crazy in love with us, with humanity. And just like any marriage, the relationship between God and humanity hasn't always been easy – the course of true love never did run smooth. And that has been entirely our fault. It's rare in marriage counseling to tell a couple that all their problems are entirely the fault of one party, that the other is entirely innocent, but when it comes to the relationship between God and humanity, that's just the way it is. We are the ones who have been unfaithful, who have broken God's heart again and again and again. And so of course, when we're speaking to the world about their relationship with God, there's going to be a call back to faithfulness, a call to love God the way we have been loved, a call to do the hard work necessary to begin to repair the damage we've done to God's creation and God's children all around us. But if we're not careful, we start to make that relationship with God sound like it's about nothing but work, nothing but discipline, nothing but this tiring slog of obedience and duty and obligation, that this is what God wants of us, this is what God expects of us. And that is just not true. God's relationship with

humanity, God's relationship with each one of us, it starts with love. It starts with joy. It starts with celebration, God celebrating and rejoicing over each and every beloved, treasured individual. Our relationship with God can't only be about hard work and duty, it's about joy. It's about celebrating the unending love that God has for each of us, it's about finding joy even in unexpected moments, in ordinary things, discovering that God's love has transformed something seemingly mundane and simple into something extraordinary, an opportunity to celebrate how good it is to be loved by our Creator and King. Our God has promised to love us, all of us, for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, through trouble and through tragedy, our God has promised to be by our side, to lift us up, to make us strong. And God promises to bring us joy, to take the ordinary things of life and make them special and new in the light of God's love, to transform water into wine each and every day so we can rejoice in the presence of Jesus Christ. Following Jesus means living a life of celebration – yes, there will be moments of work, and moments of hardship, but in every moment, for better and for worse, God walks with us, God pours out love and joy on humanity and calls us to rejoice, to celebrate how good it is to be so deeply loved. Today and everyday, may we discover the joys of following Jesus, may we celebrate how good it is to be loved by our creator and King, may we see water become wine in our lives and in the world. In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen!