

## THE MIRACLE AT THE WEDDING AT CANA IN GALILEE



The Fourth Gospel 2:11 "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."

The wedding at Cana in Galilee is one of my very favorite stories in the Gospels, for there is something so very real and very authentic in how this event is described. In addition, there are several aspects of this story which distinguish it from all the other miracle stories. Traditionally, the miracle of turning the water in wine at the wedding at Cana in Galilee is considered the first of Jesus' miracles, and what a start it was!

To begin with, the whole event is introduced so nonchalantly. The Scriptures read simply that "On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.” That seems to suggest to me that this is a wedding to which Jesus’ mother had primarily been invited. Like many mothers, Mary seems to have insisted that Jesus come along as well. Many of us have been there, have had mothers who have told us that we simply must go to this or that event, and we have dutifully gone because we have to, although we don’t really want to be there, and like Jesus, often we’ll bring a few friends with us to make it all the more palatable. This all sounds very real.

The next feature of this story is the astonishing reluctance with which Jesus appears to have performed the miracle of turning water into wine. No other story that I can think of reveals Jesus as being so reticent about discharging a miracle, except perhaps for the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman, you remember her, the one who had to beg for the bread crumbs that fell from the table for Jesus to heal her daughter. In the wedding story, it appears that it was only the insistence of his mother that Jesus “do something” which served as catalyst for his action. “They have no wine,” Jesus’ mother states simply. “They have no wine.” I would love to know what her tone of voice was in saying that. Was it sad, anxious, insistent? Nevertheless, Jesus enigmatically replies, as he always does with his mother, “O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” Now what does he mean by that? Jesus’ response might be translated more loosely into something like: “Oh, mother, please, not now,” a phrase which

is familiar to all of us who know the pressures which others can bring to bear upon us, and especially the pressures from our mothers, but we are not exactly sure what Jesus means. Still like most mothers, Mary doesn't pay much mind to his response and turns to the servants, instructing them to: "Do whatever he tells you." Then she appears to go back to the wedding party, sure that her son will take care of things, one way or another, despite his initial reluctance.

The second usual aspect of this story, which is rare in the other miracle tales, is the unseen nature of the miracle. Jesus turns 120 to 180 gallons of water into wine, and almost no one really knows about it, except for the servants who had drawn the water in the first place. Not even Mary seems privy to the actual deed. Thus, the beneficiaries of this miracle, those party-goers, the steward of the feast, and even the bride and bridegroom, don't really seem to know of the miracle which has happened in their very midst. The bridegroom probably just thought someone else had provided some additional wine. He doesn't appear to demand an explanation from the steward. or to seek out Jesus and thank him. He goes back to enjoy the party and the day of his marriage; like the others, not aware that they are participants in Jesus' first miracle, wrought at that wedding at Cana in Galilee.

Finally, there is a lack of drama to this miracle. No one is crying out to be healed in this story; no one is lame here, or blind, or deaf or dumb. No one has died. There's no apparent

tragedy, no women sobbing with tears. They are simply out of wine at a wedding. This is embarrassing perhaps, unfortunate for sure. But there's no real affliction or hardship here, no real misery or grief. And perhaps as a consequence of this lack of drama, there is no real awe or wonder after the water has become wine, no real appreciation of what has happened. The steward of the feast is just surprised that the best wine has been saved for last, and also pleased, and so the show goes on. No one falls at Jesus' feet with thanksgiving, as will happen later at Bethany. There's no real marvel in the crowd, as there will be later at Nazareth, no whispers as there will be in Jerusalem, no apparent hint of recognition of what has happened or of who Jesus really is. The music starts up again, and the party just goes on.

One might try to read into this occasion, a story of Mary's faith and recognition of Jesus, but that's not exactly what the story says. We are told by the gospel writer that there Jesus 'manifested his glory', so perhaps the story is told to suggest that his disciples believed in him as a result of this miracle. Maybe we are to understand that the disciples saw what was happening here, that they understood the significance of this event, and that they came to believe in Jesus more fervently as a consequence of the miracle. But we are not exactly told that either and thus we do not really know for sure to whom Jesus manifested his glory, if to anyone.

What we are told and what we do know for certain is that, thanks to Jesus, the wedding celebration at Cana in Galilee could go on joyously uninterrupted, the drinking and revelry could continue. It is perhaps for this reason a lovely story and a favorite for many, certainly a favorite of mine. Indeed, some people find a paradigm for the whole Christian experience in this tale, in its revelation of the subtle blessings of God upon our lives, blessings most often unseen and unrealized by us. We take for granted so many of God's real gifts to us, without stopping to ponder the miracles of our life, or to thank God for them. We simply take up another glass of wine unknowingly and without thought return to the dance floor when the music starts again, so as to enjoy the party.

A spirit of merriment is surprisingly, I think, the predominant mood of this story. I cannot think of another occasion in the New Testament where simple gaiety is so prevailing. There is almost a naiveté or innocence to this story. Life is a party, it seems to say, and we are meant to enjoy it. This tale reminds us of the joy of friends, and good times, and celebration. We have all been there and we have all done that. There is an affirmation here of the basic goodness of life. And sometimes we seem to forget this; sometimes religious people in particular become so serious and dour, so forceful and resolute, that there appears to be no place for simple joy and partying in our lives anymore; no fun or innocent amusements. Some Christians have a hard time

appreciating this story and its intent. They sometimes find it difficult incorporating it into their version of the Christian message because there is a lack of emphasis in this story on Jesus, or on faith or on believing, or even on the miracle itself and our response to it. There are no apparent demands placed upon the believers in this story, no realization of the tragedy of life, no recognition of human misery and sin. This story ignores the angry crowds that later turn against Jesus, the mobs that cry out for his crucifixion, and his suffering and death upon the cross. Indeed, I had some tee-totaling Baptist friends when I was in university, who as Baptists are opposed to drinking alcohol, and who would have found this story much easier to take and to understand, if Jesus had simply turned the wine into water, and not visa-versa.

All of us, at times, forget to appreciate what God has done for us, and what God wants for us. And what God really wants for us most of all is joy and happiness, that we all might have life, and live it most abundantly. Let us be glad and rejoice. AMEN