

I love this miracle story. This account from John's Gospel of Jesus changing water into wine at the wedding in Cana of Galilee has always exerted a kind of special tug on my imagination, it always seems to draw me in. And it is traditionally one of the central stories of Epiphany, of the way Jesus shows forth in his person and his ministry the presence and the power of God.

One of the reasons I think the wine miracle is so fascinating, and so good a sign of how Jesus epiphanizes God, is that, out of all the miracles attributed to Jesus in all four Gospels, this is the only miracle that Jesus does just for the sheer *joy* of it. In every other miracle attributed to Jesus, someone's life is at stake. In every other miracle, someone is ill, or deranged, or disabled, or dying, or dead—so Jesus miraculously heals them. Or a crowd is out in the wilderness, far from towns and villages, faint with hunger—so Jesus miraculously feeds them. Or disciples are in a boat in a storm, and the wind and the waves threaten to capsize and drown them—so Jesus miraculously stills the storm. In every other miracle, someone's life is at stake, someone's well-being is at risk, and there is a note of *urgency* in Jesus' acting miraculously to save them. But not in this miracle. Oh to be sure, it would be embarrassing and humiliating and a notable social gaffe for a newlywed couple to run out of wine at their party; but it's hardly as if their *lives* are at stake, it's hardly as if their need for wine is an *urgent* matter of life and death. Yet Jesus Jesus does the miracle, Jesus makes the wine for them. And not just a little wine: Jesus makes a *lot* of wine. John says there are six stone jars there, each holding about thirty gallons. Archeologists have found similar jars from other synagogues of that period, so we know John was being accurate in his details here. That's 180 gallons of wine Jesus makes, far more than would be needed for a simple wedding party; that's a lot of wine. And it's not just any wine: Jesus makes *really good* wine. It's so good the steward gives the bridegroom credit for being a good host because he's saved the best wine for last. In this miracle Jesus makes a lot of really good wine, and he makes it not because anyone's life is at stake, not because anyone needs saving, but just so that the people there can share in sheer joy.

And for that reason, I think it is *especially* interesting that Jesus does this miracle at a wedding feast. Wedding feasts are, of course, joyous occasions right on the surface of it. But nothing in John's Gospel ever happens just on the surface of it. Everything in the Gospel of John is always more than meets the eye, everything in the Gospel of John always has extra layers of meaning that lead us from the ordinary to the extraordinary, that lead us to see earthly things in spiritual connections. This wedding feast is more than meets the eye because in the Jewish piety of the time, the imagery of marriage was already a traditional and time-honored symbol for the relationship between God and the faithful people. We can see that in our First Testament reading for today, in this passage where Isaiah promises that God will restore the people, that God will re-establish the people in their own city, in their own homeland, where they will be able to build up lives of justice and peace in faithfulness to God's call to them. And the language Isaiah uses to convey this promise is "Your land shall be called Married ... for as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." The imagery of a marriage between God and the people is Isaiah's ultimate symbol for the abundant life God wants for them. And the imagery of marriage was one of Jesus' favorite symbols as well: Matthew, Mark, and Luke record several parables where Jesus uses the wedding feast as a symbol for the kingdom come, for the fullness of compassion and love and abundant life for everyone that will come when God's true reign is all in all. In Jesus' teaching the wedding feast is often a symbol for the marriage of heaven and earth, for the life of resurrection in which everything—every person, every being, every creature—everything is raised up and made whole and made what God intends it to be. This wedding feast at Cana of Galilee is for John's Gospel not just a party for a young couple and their village friends: it is a glimpse, a hint, a foretaste of the Great Life that is God's will for all.

So if we put all these symbols together, what this miracle story is telling us is that the reign of God, the fulfillment of all things in God's gracious will, is characterized first and foremost, above all else, by *joy*, by sheer abundant really-high-quality *joy*. And what this miracle tells us is that we catch glimpses of the reign of God, we participate in Jesus' mission to bring about the reign of God, when we create moments of joy, when we bring together people and material objects and the activity of the Spirit and open up among them a space for the emergence of genuine joy. And by "joy" here I mean something more than just pleasure, or having fun, or a kind of frivolous feel-good-ism. "Joy" in this sense is something very deep, something that touches and moves our deepest hearts, something that comes from a sense of being in direct contact with the fundamental *goodness* at the heart of all things. Joy is what the musician feels at that moment when she's not sure if she is making the music or if the music is making her; joy is what you feel when you reach out in compassion to someone who is hurting, and even in the midst of pain, you know that you have shared together something good; joy is what a group of people feel when together they build anew out of what before was mere wreckage. That's what Isaiah means when he tells the returning exiles to rejoice; that's what Paul means when he writes to the Philippians to rejoice always and he says again "Rejoice"; that's what the Epistle to the Hebrews means when it says Jesus endured the his passion and suffering and crucifixion and death "for the sake of the joy that was set before him"; that's what John means when he tells us Jesus made water into wine for the sheer joy of it.

And we catch glimpses of the reign of God, we participate in Jesus' mission to bring about the reign of God, when we help create moments of that kind of joy. That's one of the most important things we as the church can do. That's what we're all here for today: we join in this Eucharist, not just because it's what we always do on Sundays, and not just because it's our church duty, but because this is where we come together to get a glimpse of Christ's wedding feast, this is where we come together to feel the touch of joy. On Friday we had a funeral here in our church, and it was a very sad occasion, because we were burying Tom Lerner, who was loved and respected all through the community, and who died too young because of cancer—it was a very sad occasion, and yet, even in the midst of that sadness, we remembered the gift of Tom's life and the joy he himself took in living, and we proclaimed the Good News of New Life in Christ, and we came together in compassion and love, and therefore that funeral, even in the midst of sadness, was also an experience of joy. This week many of us have been praying and giving and advocating for Haiti after the devastating earthquake that hit on Tuesday—and while we are horrified and heartbroken at the pictures we've seen and reports we've heard of buildings collapsed and people killed and lives shattered, still we give of ourselves for Haiti in faith that we can be part of the process by which God takes up even that wreckage and creates from it new possibilities for rebuilding and life and love for the sake of joy that is set before them. Over and over, in ways large and small, in giving and working and praying and gathering, we do what we do in the church because that is how we catch a glimpse of Christ's kingdom in the sharing of joy.

Jesus changed water into wine, just for the sheer joy of it, to be an epiphany of the reign of God. May we let the joy of Christ change the ordinary works of our lives into extraordinary epiphanies of God's power and presence for our world, too. Amen.