

# Wedding in Cana

John 2.1-12

Rev Dr Jos M. Strengholt

Imagine that Jesus would be present at our own wedding parties. Would that not make those wedding parties exciting. Imagine what could happen if he were in our midst!

The story of the wedding in Cana, as told by John the Evangelist, can be read as a simple miracle story, but if we dig a bit deeper we find a wealth of meaning for us today.

Some of the meaning can be detected on the surface, by reading carefully. But we must also know a little of the habits, the culture of weddings in the days of Jesus.

## 1. Jesus and disciples and Mary on wedding

The story is introduced with the words 'on the third day'. If you look back in the previous chapter of John, you will notice that on the first and on the second day, Jesus was calling five men to become his disciples.

The wedding party, by the way, started on a Wednesday - that was the habit in Israel.

The first thing he did with the disciples whom he called on Monday and Tuesday was to go to a wedding party on Wednesday. No theological studies first. No preaching. Jesus made clear to his disciples that he was not a killjoy. He introduces his followers to a feast.

Yes, such a Lord we love to follow and serve, such a Lord we like in our life!

The event was in Cana, just a small village, a few kilometers away from Nazareth where Jesus had lived most of his life. From the edge of Nazareth you could see Cana.

The village was small, unimportant, full of small and unimportant people. Poor people, I think. Why otherwise would they run out of wine at a wedding party?

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was present at the party, and how she commands



the servants to do what Jesus says, gives the impression that she might have played a formal role in organizing the feast.

The least we can assume is that the family of those who married were friends, or even family, of Jesus and his mother.

Some old Coptic documents say that Mary was the aunt of the bridegroom, and that the bridegroom was no one less than John, who would later be called by Jesus to be

his disciple as well. In that case, John is here in the Gospel writing about his own wedding.

The couple wore crowns and bridal robes - just as this is even nowadays done in the orthodox churches - I have often seen it in Egypt. At least for one week in their life, the poor groom and his bride were treated like a king and his queen.

Wine was essential at such weddings. A saying of the rabbis was, that "without wine there is no joy." So a little disaster was at hand - there was

no more wine. Had they miscalculated how much they needed? Had too many guests shown up? Were they simply too poor to buy enough?

The wine ran out. Hospitality was a sacred duty and for the provisions to fail at a wedding would be a terrible humiliation for the bride and the bridegroom. Even in our days, we feel really bad if there is not enough food and drinks at a party.

But in those days this was much worse. Israel had some interesting social and economic habits.

If one gave a feast of such and such a quality and with such a quantity of meat and wine when his son was married, the father of the bridegroom was entitled to a similar feast when his neighbor's son was married.

If the neighbor did not provide a similar wedding, with similar amounts of food and drinks, then he could be taken to court and sued; a wedding feast was not simply a social occasion, but it involved legal obligations for the guests. If you sat as a guest in a party, you had the legal obligation to throw a similar party when your turn came.

Imagine that the wine runs out in your party - they the neighbor could take you to court because he had last year given a better party when his son was married.



This may sound strange to us, but in a poor society it is not so strange to think that if I have to feed my neighbor for a week and give him drinks for a week, I would be entitled to similar treatment by my neighbor.

So it may be that Jesus rescued a young couple not just from social disgrace but also from a financial liability that would have crippled them economically for many years to come. Jesus came to the rescue of a poor family in great financial stress.

## 2. Mary steps in

Mary noticed the problem and she stepped in, to save the party and the newly wedded couple. Mary's action shows her great faith in her son Jesus.

The words that Jesus uses for his mother do not sound very kind. "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

That word 'woman' sounds not polite to us, but it did show respect. When Jesus is hanging on the cross, he wants John to take care of his mother, so he says: "Woman, John is your son, John, this is your mother."

At the same time, Jesus suggests that Mary is asking something that she should not be bothered about. "What does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come."

Here, at the beginning of his ministry, when he has just started to call his first followers, Jesus refers to his death and resurrection. That is what his life would be about - the long route to Jerusalem. For that he has come into the world. Not for producing wine for wedding parties.

But there is a link of course. Because Jesus had come for setting people's life on the right track with God, and for giving people abundant life with God, this also impacts on our daily life today.

He has, at the hour of his death and resurrection, opened the way to the eternal wedding feast for us, and in this present life He makes us enjoy a foretaste of that eternal banquet

Our Christian view is not so spiritual and otherworldly that it does not involve God in our normal life of today.

He wants us today to lead a life of peace and love and joy, and God is not in the least against wonderful wedding parties, or any parties. They are a celebration of the great life that God has given and they are a foretaste of the abundant life that will overwhelm heaven and earth one day.

Did Mary understand something of this? Probably not. But even when Jesus tells her that his time has not yet come, she is sure that he will do something even for that poor couple and for their party. She knew what sort of son she had.

Mary believed in him so much that she turned to the servants and told them, “Do whatever he tells you to do.”

What a lesson for the new disciples of Jesus. They had hardly started following him or they learned this wonderful lesson. “Jesus wants the best for us, but we must do what he says.”

In our needs, in our problems, in our struggles, we are entitled to pray and to expect our Lord to come and to be of help. But he also expects us to do what he says. Love and mercy are balanced by truth and obedience.

Then Jesus takes action; he has the six massive water jars filled to the brim with water. John says specifically that these jars were for the purifying ceremonies of the Jews.



This water was used for cleansing the feet on entry to the house. The roads were dusty, and people walked on sandals. On a dry day the feet were covered by dust and on a wet day they were soiled with mud; water was used for cleansing the feet.

The water was also required for washing the hands. Strict Jews washed their hands before a meal and between each course, and how to do this, how to wash, was specified in detail in Israel’s religious laws.

If this was not done, the hands were ritually unclean and the person would eat unclean food. A great taboo in Israel. It was for this foot washing and hand washing that these great stone jars of water stood there.

Is what happens next, maybe John’s message, that the Jewish purification rites would become unnecessary? Maybe. In any case, Jesus uses the water pots for something much more meaningful, and for something that in our Christian mind, often signifies what Christ has done for us. A perfect redemption with his blood that makes all other purification habits unnecessary.

### **3. The sign of his glory**

When these waterpots were filled, each held between twenty and thirty gallons of water. This means that the six together contained between 500 and 700 liters of wine. What an abundance! Much more than needed in that wedding!

When the grace of Jesus comes to us there is enough and extra for all. No wedding party in Cana could drink another 700 liters of wine after the original stock had run out. No need on earth can exhaust the grace of Christ; there is a glorious superabundance in it.

John says that this miracle of the changing of water into wine was the first of the signs that Jesus did. It was a sign, it signified something.

One of the signs, mentioned in Israel's Holy Scriptures, of the arrival of the Messiah was abundance; here we have the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies:

"The Lord will give what is good, and our land will yield its increase.(Psalm 85.12) "The threshing floors shall be full of grain, the vats shall overflow with wine and oil" (Joel 2.24; cf. Amos 9.13-15).

John shows us: here is the Messiah of Israel, the Redeemer of the world. Later on, in chapter 10, John highlights our Lord's words: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."

The Fathers of the church have seen, in this good wine coming at the end, the reward and joy of eternal life that God gives to those who desire to follow Christ and who have suffered bitterness and contradiction in this life. But that reward is not only for the end.

Even now, while we are in the midst of the bitterness of life, our Lord lets us enjoy many foretastes of his coming Kingdom. Even as with bread and wine today we anticipate the eternal feast in heaven.

John wants us to see not only that Jesus once, on a day in Cana, miraculously turned water into wine; he wants us to see that here is the Redeemer of the World who one day will restore the whole world to the abundance that God intends us to enjoy.

And whenever Jesus comes into your life, even today, there comes a new quality which is like turning water into wine. Without Jesus, life can be dull and stale and flat; when Jesus comes into it, life becomes more vivid and sparkling and exciting. Without Jesus, life can be drab and uninteresting; with him it is better.

This first sign of Jesus manifested his glory, John says. It shows us that he is not a mere man, but in him the glory of God is visible. No wonder that we read that the disciples believed in him.

Well, yes, so would I if in front of my eyes I saw water being turned into good wine.

## **Conclusion**

Let us put our hope in this glorious Lord who by his divine power can change water into wine and who will make this whole world one day into a great winefest.

Let us trust in this Lord and pray to him - he wants to give us many foretastes of the coming turnaround of heaven and earth.

And let us - with this great Lord in mind - carefully heed the words of his mother. "Do whatever he tells you to do."

**Amen +**