

“There was a Wedding”

20 January 2019: 2nd Sunday after the Epiphany

Salado UMC—Salado, Texas 76571

Preaching Text: John 2:1-11

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“The music at a wedding procession always reminds me of the music of soldiers going into battle”
(Heinrich Heine, 1797 - 1856).

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Have you noticed that nothing is private anymore? In the olden days, people had a modicum of a private life. If a person did not want to share something embarrassing or compromising, then that something would die with them. Yet, today, nothing is really private. This isn’t going to change. In fact, privacy will continue to erode. Emails, cell phone use, photos, an online footprint, and more each tell their own stories with data. People do cruel things to each other for aberrant reasons—and social media assists. Thus, nothing is ever truly private. Of course, we conduct ourselves accordingly.

One thing that has not changed much over the last twenty-one centuries is that most folks like a good party. In Jesus’ time, people threw the best parties in conjunction with weddings. Usually weddings lasted for weeks. Everyone would eat and drink until they could do so no longer. John conveys in this wedding story some fundamental notions about Jesus and ourselves.

As our fourth Gospel, John makes little attempt to provide a chronological account of Jesus’ life. Other Gospels at least offer this veneer. John suggests his aim: “These things are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (John 20:31). John’s Gospel includes signs, miracles stories, and other literary features as he relates his narrative. Hear our morning’s lesson, John’s account of the Wedding at Cana:

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴ And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵ His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim.

⁸ He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. ⁹ When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him (John 2:1-11).

Let’s consider a few ways John writes his story. In verse 1 “wedding” symbolizes the prophetic concept for “a time of fulfillment” for God’s purposes. The wedding feast represented the joy of God’s reign. In verse 4, “my hour” (See also 7:30; 8:20; 12:23, 27; 13:1; 17:1) refers to John’s timetable for fulfilling God’s promises in Jesus, the messiah. John writes that the wine stewards used “stone water jars.” Jews used stone jars because they would not contract ritual uncleanness. We mull over John’s mention (verse 8) of

the “chief steward.” At Gentile banquets, to be “steward” was to honor a guest. Jewish weddings may have also followed such a practice. Today, we might call this steward a headwaiter/toastmaster or simply a host. Also, Mary’s anxious concern with the wine shortage suggests it was a wedding for a close relative.

Often when addressing John’s “Wedding at Cana” text there are two primary matters people want to explore. The first is how exactly did Jesus turn water into wine? I am certainly not able to explain Jesus’ miracles in answer to such a question. I do, however, remember that Soren Kierkegaard observed the church’s great miracle was to turn Christ’s wine back into water. A second question about the passage focuses on Jesus’ reply to his mother. There is a theological explanation for John’s recording of Jesus’ terse reply to his mother. It is fairly complicated, but we will address that issue when we explore Jesus’ remark that “his hour has come” (John 12:23).

When I thought about our church’s new leadership this week, I decided that I wanted to explore something from John 2 that I had never previously noticed. It comes from this part of the text:

When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom [10] and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now” (John 2:9-10).

The steward was pouring the wedding wine, making him an important fellow. He checked the wine quality and made a startling discovery—an old trick of party-throwing. To illustrate the kind of scene John conveys, I want to attempt an analogy. People have told me that at some Super Bowl parties, the host puts out a case of Heineken or Michelob to get the football game rolling. After the guests have poured down a few cool ones, the host pulls out the much cheaper Old Milwaukee, hoping few guests either notice or care about the host’s cost saving measures.¹

Yet, at the wedding in Cana, the wine steward noticed the groom had saved the best wine for last. He thought the groom an extravagant host and generous. He praised the groom’s generosity in front of all the guests. In effect, he made the groom a hero at his own wedding. Plainly, a few servants and disciples knew the truth. But the point is that Jesus, by working this miracle and with the steward’s help, had made someone else look good. And: Do you think the groom denied his newly acquired eminence?

Every student knows of Isaac Newton’s encounter with a falling apple. Newton discovered and introduced the laws of gravity, revolutionizing astronomical studies in the 1680s. But few people remember that if it weren’t for Edmund Halley, the world might never have learned from Newton. Halley challenged Newton to revisit his original notions. Halley then revised Newton’s mathematical mistakes and prepared figures to support Newton’s discoveries. Halley coaxed the hesitant Newton to write his great work, *Principia Mathematica* (5 July 1687). Halley edited and supervised the publication. Halley even financed its printing, although Newton was wealthier, easily affording the printing costs.

Historians call it one of the most selfless acts in science annals. Newton began instantly to reap the rewards; Halley received little credit. Halley did use the principles to predict the orbit and return of the comet later bearing his name. Only after his death did Halley receive any acclaim. Because the comet

¹ This illustration in no way endorses the use of alcohol; it rather recreates the narrative suggested by the quotation: “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk.”

returns every seventy-six years, the notice is infrequent. Halley remained a devoted scientist who didn't care who received the credit as long as the cause advanced. Many others have played Halley's role. John the Baptist said of Jesus, "He must become greater; I must become less." Barnabas was content to introduce others to greatness. Many people pray to uphold the work of one Christian leader. Such selflessness advances the kingdom.²

Wouldn't it be a great blessing to our congregation, if our church leaders and leaders in our society took a page from John's Gospel and made someone else look good? Each of us this year has this opportunity "to make someone else look good" by the deeds we do on behalf of all people in general, and our church in particular. If leaders can lead in a way that makes those they lead look good, then we all prosper. More importantly, maybe God's Kingdom will draw a wee bit closer to Salado, Texas. Amen.

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² C.S. Kirkendall, Jr.