

Why does Jesus do it? We ask that of our Lord's miracles, the ones that we typically think of, healing, casting out demons, raising the dead, and it seems pretty obvious. He wants the blind to see, the deaf to hear, the lame to walk. He wants to set His people free from the oppression of demons. He hates death. But why turn 120 to 180 gallons of water into prime vintage wine after the wedding guests had already drunk freely? Does the Lord simply want to prolong the joy of the occasion? The psalmist does say after all "wine gladdens the heart of man" (Ps 104:15). Is it to spare the family embarrassment? Even today at wedding celebrations there is pressure on each family to live up to, to deliver on the expectations of what they are to provide, and if it fails there is unhappiness, criticism, and embarrassment. Does Jesus simply desire to spare friends or family from embarrassment?

The holy evangelist tells us that this was "**the first of His signs...Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested His glory. And His disciples believed in Him**" (Jn 2:11). Did you notice what John calls it? Not a "miracle," it was that, but here it is called a "sign." What does a sign do? It announces something. Head east on I-80 and a sign will announce that you've entered into the state of Iowa. Goodbye beef country; hello pork central! Signs point you to something. Go west into Colorado, and sign after sign will tell you how to get to whatever 14,000 foot mountain you wish to ascend. They point to where you're going.

Changing water into wine prolonged the joyous occasion of a wedding in Cana and in the face of trial and embarrassment, Jesus alleviated the newly married couple of shame. This all shows us that Jesus loves marriage. He created it. He blesses the union of man and woman in holy marriage because it is a reflection of His own love for His bride, it is a picture of what He has done for the Church. That fact, and how that is lived out in marriage is a sermon in itself. Suffice it to say, because it's worth saying and needs to be said clearly, this shows us several things: the problem of so-called same-sex marriage. It is utterly incompatible with what God's Word teaches us about marriage, what marriage is for, and what marriage lives out.

The miracle in itself also shows us the Lord's kindness for those who are married. Nothing has changed in 2,000 years. Marriage brings plenty of occasion for embarrassment, very real trials and crosses. This often leads not just to shame and pain, but even to the dissolution of marriage under the burdens which are placed upon it. Jesus shows us here His kindly disposition and blessing upon this holy estate. His mother gives us a godly exhortation. In time of need and confusion, fret not, do not be anxious. Rather, "**Do whatever He tells you.**" The Lord has made promises to you. They are sure and certain. Believe them. Trust His Word. He knows the right time to grant not just relief, but the sweet wine of joy.

All this is true. But what this event shows us as a sign, what it announces and points toward, is something far greater and far deeper. The sign is done at a wedding. At a wedding there is an ending and a beginning. The mother, sometimes even the father of the bride weeps, for their daughter leaves that day to become a wife. Like it or not, the relationship changes. The beginning of the Lord's ministry, His increase, means that John the Baptist must decrease. The great and mighty prophets who impress us with their preaching give way to One who speaks with far greater authority. They yield to Him who gave them the very words which they wrote. The impressive priesthood with its garments and rituals, the splendor of the temple is less than that greater and eternal priesthood of Jesus.

We see this in the jars of water for purification. For ritual washing for cleansing was an integral part of Jewish life. The sacrifices and washings, the avoidance of certain foods, the casting out of all things and people who were unclean, they were costly, involved, and painful reminders of the need to be cleansed and purified, forgiven of sin. We wash our hands because of the threat of germs. Jews washed their hands, their feet, their heads, because of the clear and present danger of sin.

But at Jesus' command the water in the stone jars becomes wine. The jars are ruined for the purpose of purification. They are stained with wine's color and flavor. Their purpose is fulfilled. They are no longer needed. We are given joy and gladness because He who is Himself our purification has come. The true and heavenly Bridegroom has come to redeem His Bride. The sign points to that. Jesus speaks of it when He says to His mother, "**Woman, what does this have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.**" Initially we might think the Lord addresses His mother harshly.

But consider that when His hour has come, when He is lifted up on the cross in glory as the Savior of the world, it is there once again where Mary appears, and once again He calls her “Woman.” There she beholds her Son, the Seed of the Woman promised in Genesis chapter 3 after the Fall into sin. There she sees in that moment the serpent’s head crushed even as her own Son’s heel is bruised unto death.

That moment is Jesus’ hour. In John chapter 13, on the night He is betrayed, we are told that “**Jesus knew that His hour had come**” (13:1). His hour arrives, and having finished all on the cross, having put an end to all the washings and purifications, the sacrifices and shedding of blood of the old covenant, He yields up His spirit, giving His very life for His Bride. And it is from His side that water and blood flow. It is in that tide which flows from His pierced side that you are washed. Your baptism is done only once, but you remember it daily. This washing, in which you are joined to Jesus’ death and resurrection, is good for a lifetime. As baptized Christians, when you are terrified by your sins, when their polluting stain would have you think God has no use or desire for you, when you would be tempted to rely on your own efforts to cleanse yourself, remember your baptism! Hear the words of St. Paul: “**you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God**” (1 Cor 6:11). It was done there.

And the blood which ran in streams from the Lord’s all-loving heart flows by the power of His own word into the chalice set forth here today. Here is the cup which runneth over, there is no end. There’s as much blood, more grace, than you’ve got sins and shame. Here is the true wine which makes glad the heart of man by the forgiveness of sins. Here is the source of joy that endures even in midst of crosses. Here, even as we do receive Christ’s true body and blood, we have a sign of what is to come. This is but the foretaste, an anticipation of the full communion with our Lord. Here it is done through unseeing faith that believes His words, but it points to the day when our very eyes shall behold Him, when we shall be joined in full with those to whom we are already mystically united in the fellowship of this altar, and when our longing and sorrows will give way to joy to the full.