

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Watertown, WI**

**“A Minor Guest at a Major Wedding”**

Rev. David K. Groth

January 17, 2021

*“On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus was also invited to the wedding with his disciples” (Jn. 2:1).*

One day, Jesus was invited to a wedding. He was just baptized and has assembled about half his disciples. There’s not been much instruction yet, nor has He done any miracles. In other words, no one really knows who Jesus is at this wedding. Of course, His mother does, and a few others might know Him as a carpenter from Nazareth, but to everyone else, Jesus is just another minor guest at a major wedding. The crowds have gathered, but not for Him. A grand table has been set, but He’s not sitting in the seat of honor. There’s feasting and drinking and storytelling and laughter, but Jesus is off to the side, where the other servants have huddled.

A crisis is brewing there. They are nearly out of wine. It’s actually a major faux pas, disaster even in that culture. At the time Jewish wedding feasts were as grand as possible. Even if the food and its portions were humble out of necessity, the expectation was that at least there would be ample supplies of wine, the universal drink. However, at this wedding, the wine is gone but the guests are not. Maybe the family is poor, and that’s why the supplies are limited. If that’s the case, it’s not difficult to imagine their painful embarrassment.

When Mary learns of the problem, she turns to her son and says in effect, “You know, it’d be nice if you did something about this.” The response of Jesus is a little testy. “This isn’t my problem, nor yours for that matter.” Mary ignores all that and says to the servants, “Do *whatever* He tells you.” Notice the word, “whatever.” In other words, however strange it may seem to you, just do what he tells you. Even if it seems foolish to your wise eyes, useless, trivial, whatever it proves to be just do it. Now Jesus was an invited guest, so it’s a little odd that he would be giving orders to the servants. But He’s had a change in heart, and on the force of Mary’s confidence, the servants are ready to do as told.

Nearby, there are six stone water pots which the Jews used for ceremonial hand washing, each holding between 20 and 30 gallons. “Fill them” Jesus says, and the staff does so, right to the brim. “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast” (who’s sort of like the caterer). You can imagine their secret thoughts, but they take a cup of what they know is water and they find the master of the feast. He has a sip, and his eyebrows jump. It’s wine. Really good wine. And he’s told that where that comes from, there’s a whole lot more.

So, that’s His first miracle. What do you think of that? If you were somehow an advisor to Jesus, would you have advised Him to do this? “They might have too much” you would caution. “Losing their inhibitions, they might make really poor decisions, Jesus, and that would reflect poorly on you.” “And besides, it’s not really a necessity.” And you’d be right on all counts. And of course, Jesus knows all this; still, He chooses to give the couple this gift.

The Bible, of course, has many warnings against intoxication. Ephesians 5, “Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.” And Proverbs says, “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise.” But wine can also be a symbol of joy in the Bible. Psalm 104, “wine gladdens the heart of man.” And Jesus also knows that providing wine, (particularly this fine wine), will save this young couple a great deal of pain and embarrassment. It’s a thoughtful little miracle, but it also teaches us something, as every miracle does.

Think of it this way: If wine gladdens the heart of man, and Jesus provided the wine at Cana, then *Jesus* gladdens the heart of man. Jesus intends to bring *joy* to people in this life and in the life to come. This

first miracle is a clear signal that He's not here to make your life all grim and dark and serious. He comes to bring joy and gladness. Now, of course there is pain often associated with being a Christian, and Jesus warns us of that too. But over that and superseding that there is a certain joy and peace that Jesus brings into our lives.

So, why don't we invite him into more of the stuff of our lives? I've witnessed a lot of great big marriage celebrations, and often sense Jesus is still a minor guest at a major wedding. He's someone the couple feels obligated to invite but aren't sure why. Their guests may wonder about it too. "Why is *He* here? Must be a friend of the groom's mom or somethin'."

Sometimes Jesus isn't invited at all, from the grand celebrations of life to the family sitting around a midweek dinner of spaghetti. Sometimes we forget to invite Him because that's our habit. Sometimes we deliberately leave Him off the list because He might embarrass us, we think, or quash the joy. And remember Jesus is humble; He's not going to crash your party, your relationships, your plans. If you want, you can keep Him at arm's length or even put a restraining order on Him. He won't force Himself on you or anyone else.

But if invited, He'll come. Whether it's a big display of conspicuous consumption at some fancy club, or a humble gathering in the back yard with charred hotdogs, He'll come. And He won't come as a warden or parole officer, all serious and grim. No, this miracle teaches He desires to bring gladness. Any God who brings 150 gallons of very fine wine to a party does not intend to be a killjoy. Similarly, any God who gives a thimble full of the best possible wine for you at this feast (His blood for your forgiveness) also comes to bring you joy and gladness and reconciliation and peace. He comes to pull us out of the gloomy haunts of sadness and into the bright light of eternal day. Similarly, Paul says "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness" (Gal. 5). That's the kind of fruit I want in my life. To be a Christian does not mean we must be ever serious and stern and grim.

So maybe it's time we start inviting God back into our homes (around the dinner table and in the family room). Maybe it's time to invite him back into your marriage so he can share daily mercies with you. Maybe it's time you invite Him back to your place of work, and even introduce Him to a friend who could use grace in his life. It's probably time you invite Him back into your political outlook. Remember, your enemies may not be God's enemies. Besides, your job is never to hate. Your assignment is to love your enemies and pray for them (Mt. 5:44). Don't let the anger and bitterness and hatred of this age swallow you up. Don't let it take you captive. That's not what He wants for you. He came to free you and give you joy.

So, invite Jesus into that place of your heart where you hoard up your worries. He can bear the weight of them. Invite him to the chamber next door that can be so dark and angry, hateful, and unforgiving. He'll come and open the curtains and windows and let in some cool fresh air and bright light.

Wherever invited, Jesus will come. And He doesn't feel the need to be the center of attention. He'll linger at the margins of a wedding. He'll wait in the hallway of the hospital. He'll place Himself at the very back of the funeral procession. Wherever the least and lost are gathered, the hurting and the humble, God will be there too in order to help, not to harm.

I love this, the first of His miracles. It still surprises me. But it's not just 150 gallons of fine wine he brings. He brings grace, to a very human occasion fraught with intense emotions and high expectations and petty disappointments, an occasion where people are looking at each other suspiciously or lustfully or angrily. He comes into that and turns 150 gallons of water into fine wine. That's grace. That's generosity. And that's the only way you or me or anyone else gets into the kingdom of heaven, by His grace and generosity.

"This the first of His signs Jesus did at Cana in Galilee and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him." Amen.