

LAKESWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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FROM WATER TO GLORY

John 2:1-11

Today I want to talk with you about Jesus first miracle, turning water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana. John's gospel was put into written form some 25 years after the other three gospels, known as the *Synoptic Gospels*, because of all the similarities we find in Matthew, Mark and Luke. What John does for us is to fill in the gaps, telling stories and relating miracles and actions of Jesus that are not included in the other gospels. And John writes his gospel around *Seven Wonders* or, what is sometimes called, *Seven Signs* (I think I'm seeing a sermon series in this). But for now we have the first miracle.



In some circles this is called the non-Baptist miracle. You understand, don't you? According to Baptist theology, Jesus didn't turn the water into wine ... *it was just really good grape juice!*

Maybe in your growing you had similar experiences to mine. I was raised in the conservative part of the old United Presbyterian Church and I can remember my grandma Lil talking about how when the Bible talked about wine it was really *unfermented grape juice*. But I also remember grandma never going anywhere without her bottle of medicine in her purse ... get it? "*Bottle of medicine*"? *That was bourbon.*

The reality is that wine was a part of the culture during the time of Jesus. The first miracle was changing water into wine at a wedding feast. Jesus loved a good party, but this in no way means he advocated the *misuse* of alcohol ... as most of you know my stance on that whole issue. *Nonetheless*, Jesus and his disciples were the invited guests of the bride and groom who wanted them to attend their celebrative day.



Often, people will ask a clergy person whether they still believe in miracles. I have no problem with saying "*yes.*" John tells us in the prelude to his gospel that: "*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.*"

And so, of course, there are miracles. But *more importantly*, Jesus himself says, "*Don't talk about the miracle.*" He wants us to talk about how certain events in our lives *change our relationship with him.*

So it is with the changing of the water into wine. It speaks about the miracle of God's *TRANSFORMING LOVE* in *YOUR* life and *MINE*.



Nazareth is a town of tradesman. Even today, if you were to visit Nazareth you would see buildings and trades ... the results of talented people who built and maintained a rather upper-middle class community for that day and age.

Cana, on the other hand, was where the lower economic strata of society lived. Cana was the place for *peasants*. It was what today we would refer to as the "*other side of the tracks*" ... the worst of the worst. This is *still* the case *today*. When you

visit Nazareth you can then travel to a small little community built up in the hills. Cana. In contrast to Nazareth, Cana has no status.

Jesus tells us, right from the very start of his ministry, that it is to the broken, the battered, the bruised and the bored.

This is a peasant wedding and Jesus has been invited. It would have been the ultimate disgrace for this family to run out of wine. One thing I believe this miracle says to us is that “God takes the SHAME of our lives and gives us SELF-ESTEEM.” God doesn't look outward appearances ... *God looks at the heart*. So this miracle speaks to us, even today, saying that God still takes our shame, moves us from water to wine ... giving us self-esteem – self-worth.



Kenneth and Cynthia had been divorced for about a year, when Ken came to me and asked for help. He still loved Cynthia, she had been in a terrible car accident a month earlier and Kenneth kept vigil at her bedside for nearly two weeks. He knew he had really screwed up when they were first married, confessing to me that he had been on marijuana and alcohol the day of their wedding. Their marriage had only lasted for about a year, when Cynthia had had enough of the alcohol and drug abuse. He realized he desperately needed to change and there in my office in Oklahoma Kenneth asked God for strength, and he allowed God to move him from “water to wine” which meant he gave up the drinking and the drugs so that he might be changed into God’s kind of person.

About ten years later I was in Oklahoma to do the funeral for a dear friend. Kenneth and Cynthia attended the funeral and at the luncheon following the service, Ken told me that that very day was his 10th anniversary of sobriety. By the way, a year after Ken had knelt in my office to pray for strength, he and Cynthia said their vows to one another once more and now had two beautiful children.

There are many of us who could give testimony to the fact that God took us, changed us from the SHAME based lives we had lived, and gave us a new opportunity where we now can proclaim our SELF-ESTEEM given to us because of our relationship with Jesus Christ.



The stone water-jars in the peasants’ homes were symbols of their religion. In a Jewish home, there were no pictures or idols allowed, but it was the law that prior to a feast or dinner, there would be ceremonial washing. This happened. The jars were re-filled. This was a traditional custom. The water was for external use. It was an external sign of faithfulness. It was flat and dull and it was one of those traditions that had become DRUDGERY.

Jesus is also saying, through the miracle, that he takes the common idea of washing the outside and changes water into wine demonstrating his desire that we change internally.

Jesus takes the DRUDGERY of the ORDINARY and makes it into the DELIGHT of the EXTRAORDINARY: God transforming YOUR life and MINE.



Passion is so important in our spiritual journey. There is evidenced a passion and joy within this family we call Lakewood Presbyterian Church, and I celebrate that!

As we move into a capital campaign, anticipating the new thing God is about to do in our midst, again, I sense a passion and joy about this place.

The Associate Pastor Nominating Committee has been hard at work, passionately and joyfully seeking God's direction in finding that person God has called to lead our youth and young adults in *new experiences* of God's grace and love.

Undoubtedly there *IS* and *WILL BE* numerous opportunities in the life of our congregation for *outreach* and *spiritual growth* that have given a passion and an enthusiasm to the mission and ministry we share together.

And as I've thought about all of this I was reminded of the phrase, "Change is inevitable, growth is optional."



In some of my recent reading about our global village, there is a phenomenal growth happening within the Christian Church in South America, in Africa, and just this week I read that in Brazil, in the last 5 years, there have been 150,000 new churches started. Not new Christians ... I'm talking 150,000 new churches in Brazil! There wasn't a statistic on the number of actual new Christians.

Okay, many of these new churches are Pentecostal. They worship in ways where we wouldn't feel very comfortable. But there is a passion and there is a delight in their belief in Jesus Christ. And what it says to *US* is that we, too, must keep alive the PASSION of Jesus Christ as we move from drudgery into the DELIGHT of what it means to be related to the One who *CHANGES WATER INTO WINE*.

As I said, it *IS* happening here. But we must insure that our passion and our joy are continually revealed through our weekly WORSHIP and our weekly WITNESS.

Indeed, it happens here ... we meet the passion and joy of our God.



Did you notice as the Scripture unfolded, that after the miracle of changing the water into wine, it says that Jesus' disciples "believed him"? In other words, up to this point, many of them were kind of like fans at a football game, standing on the sidelines cheering and saying, "Wow. I guess this Jesus knows what he's talking about ... such good things he teaches." They talked about Jesus, but they hadn't committed to truly *FOLLOWING* Jesus.



When someone joins our family here at LPC, I've been impressed that often one of the reasons they join is that they have questioned their faith and they want to grow. They also express wanting to be a part of the ministry we have been called to share. They're *NOT* simply saying, "We want to come and just worship." They want to come and somehow be actively involved. They want to *BECOME FOLLOWERS*. They want to *TAKE ACTION* on behalf of the One we call Jesus.

Harry Emerson Fosdick, a Presbyterian minister who became the pastor for many years at the historic Riverside Church in New York, said there was a process of *THREE STEPS* in *BECOMING FOLLOWERS OF JESUS CHRIST*:

FIRST ... There is a personal relationship with God, in Christ, that goes beyond just head knowledge and moves belief into the heart.

NEXT ... He stresses prayer as power. Prayer that *empowers us to action* not just prayer that makes requests.

AND THEN THE THIRD STEP ... Being in service to others because of your relationship with Jesus Christ.



There's a modern day proverb that goes something like this: If you want to be happy for one hour, take a nap; if you want to be happy for an afternoon, go fishing or

play golf; if you want to be happy for a month, inherit some money; if you want to be happy for a lifetime, serve Jesus Christ by helping someone else.

You know, so often I hear the statement that people choose not to be a part of the church because there are so many hypocrites in the church. I'm always tempted to say, "Yeah, we're *ALL* hypocrites, but there's always room for *ONE MORE*."

Folks, none of us is perfect ... we all sin ... we all fall *WAY* short of the standard God has set for us! *To be like Christ*. We all need a transformation. Anybody here who doesn't??? We all need to be *BORN AGAIN* and *AGAIN* and *AGAIN* and *AGAIN*. And the amazing thing is that Jesus Christ stands waiting to work a miracle in our lives ... changing *WATER* into *WINE*.

As I was working on my sermon Friday, I received an email from Joy Atkins. It was from her devotional calendar and she thought I might appreciate it. It said:

We are products of our past, but we don't have to be prisoners of it. God's purpose is not limited by your past. He turned a murderer named Moses into a leader and a coward named Gideon into a courageous hero, and he can do amazing things with the rest of your life, too.



All right, I'll be the first to admit that some things *CAN'T* be changed. We all face circumstances in life, that in reality, we have no control over. Can I hear an "Amen" to that? Life is what happens when we're making other plans ... but we *DO* have choices to make.

We can accept the miracle that God wants to give us.

God will not force himself upon us.

God, through Christ, is a gentle person.

God invites us to let him work through us ... changing *WATER* into *WINE*.

Does God still work miracles?

Does God change water into wine?

You bet he does!

It has happened in *YOUR* life and *MINE*.

➔ God through Christ changes *SHAME* into *SELF-ESTEEM*.

➔ God takes *DRUDGERY* and transforms it into *DELIGHT*.

➔ God takes us when we're simply *FANS* and invites us to become *FOLLOWERS*.



We sang that song from "Godspell" as the *Song of Preparation* for a reason. Let it become your prayer:

Day by day, day by day, O dear Lord, three things I pray:

To SEE Thee more clearly.

To LOVE Thee more dearly.

To FOLLOW Thee more nearly.

Day by, day by, day by, day by, day.



Now, go forth, loving Jesus Christ so much, that you will love nothing else too much.

Amen and Amen.