THE WEDDING

by

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Scripture – John 2:1-11

Very few shared experiences, in our lives, are more joyous than a wedding. They are times of joy, sharing our love with others, and, usually, the sharing of a meal together that reaffirms our bond with those present.

Today’s lesson from the Gospel of John focuses on Jesus’ first miracle, or sign. That is, the wedding at Cana. Cana is a village in Galilee near the Sea of Galilee. The actual site of the wedding at Cana is marked today by Latin and Greek Orthodox churches about four miles north of Nazareth.

Our text says in verse 1, “On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee”. This third day refers to the fact that it was the third day after Jesus’ baptism by John the Baptist as recorded earlier in Chapter 1, verses 29-34. On the second day Jesus called Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael (verses 35-51).

Now a Jewish wedding ceremony is quite an affair as it is today. That is, it was when a a new household was formally initiated with the blessings of the two families.

The term wedding is used only once in the Old Testament (Song of Solomon 3:11) and rarely used in the New Testament, yet, its importance in the customs of Jews and Christians cannot be underestimated. Since Genesis wedding customs have evolved, so it is hard for archaeologists and historians to precisely determine what was practiced at a wedding at any given time period. Even though that may be the case, certain things were consistent.

There is no hint of any formal religious ceremony in either the Old or New Testament. The occasion of the wedding was a legal one however and formal written contracts were certainly signed between the bride and groom.

During Bible times recorded marriages were between a man and a woman. The nuptial celebrations started with a procession from the house of the bride to the home of the bridegroom. Later the home of the bridegroom became symbolized by a tent and it was in the tent where the marriage was consummated. Both the bride and bridegroom were elaborately and beautifully dressed. The bride wore a veil, concealing her face until the bride and groom left to consummate the marriage. During the wedding there was a lot of merriment including much singing, dancing, pronouncement of blessings and recitation of poetry by villagers, family and friends. The Song of Solomon and Psalm 45 were poems frequently read at weddings. A weeklong feast followed which usually took place at the bridegroom’s home. The wedding was consummated usually on the first night in the tent, which acted as a bridal chamber.

Our story today takes place during this weeklong feast after the couple has consummated their marriage. We don’t know who it is that is getting married only that Jesus and Mary are present. Some scholars propose that this was actually Jesus’ wedding to Mary Magdalene and the actual bride and bridegroom were kept secret because the apostles didn’t approve of Jesus’ marriage. There is a first century writing outside the Bible called the Gospel of Philip. In it is a reference to the fact that Jesus was more than casual friends with Mary Magdalene and the apostles did not approve. It would seem unlikely that this wedding at Cana would be his own for two reasons: (1) it occurred three days after he was baptized and he hadn’t even met Mary Magdalene yet; and (2) it says in verses 9-10 that the steward called the bridegroom to comment on the fact that the good wine was served last instead of first. If Jesus was the bridegroom it would seem inconsistent with the rest of the story.

It seems that the wine has run out and Mary asks Jesus to help the stewards of the wedding celebration. Jesus then tells them to fill six stone jars with water. Those six jars each hold 20-30 gallons. That’s 120-180 gallons of water. Now, He asks them to take some of the water to the steward of the celebration for His sampling. They do and He is astonished at the quality of the wine.

This is a wonderful miracle. It is the kind of miracle that we would expect Jesus to do. It is one in which we can see Him celebrating and enjoying life with the people of the community. It is one where He is intimately involved with people.

But the author of the story, John, says there is more to this than just a nice story. He says in verse 11, “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”

John says this was the first of His signs. John uses the word ‘sign’ where the other gospel writers would use the word ‘miracle’. But for John this story is more than a miracle. Look again at verse 11. He says, “…and manifested his glory…” A sign, according to biblical scholar Wescott, is “a revelation of truth through the symbolism of the outward act.” Therefore, the wedding at Cana must symbolize a truth. Let’s see if we can find what that truth is.

I believe there are numerous truths evident in this story.

First of all, the story of the wedding at Cana should lead us to a larger spiritual truth and that truth is that Jesus’ religion, that is, who Jesus was as the Son of God, is superior to the religion of the Jews. The Biblical scholar Strachan says “he came to turn the water of Jewish ceremonial religion into the wine of the Christian gospel.” Jesus’ sign shows us that He is the fulfillment of the promises of the Messiah in the Old Testament. He is more than ceremony and rituals and rites. He is the embodiment of truth as evidenced in the fact that He is the Promised One of God. We need to ask ourselves if we see Jesus as more than the God we worship on Sunday morning. We need to ask ourselves if worshipping Him, going through the ceremonies, rituals and rites, is all there is. If we believe it is, then we need to re-evaluate our faith. For believing Jesus is the Promised One of God REQUIRES that we must share His wine of salvation with others. It involves worship but it also involves so much more.

Secondly, the wedding at Cana shows us Jesus’ sympathy with human need and His joy with human life. It is important that we believe that Jesus wants us to be happy and that He is there to help us whenever we need Him. Just as He was there at the wedding celebration, He is there for you and me. We can have confidence in that. And I really like the thought that He is sharing in my joy and happiness. That is, He is celebrating my marriage and my children. I need a God and Lord who understands my needs and me and this sign shows me that Jesus does.

Thirdly, the wedding at Cana shows us that Jesus does not skimp in giving us what we need. He told the people to fill the jars FULL of water. He could have told them to just fill them half full or to just fill half the jars. NO. He told them to fill ALL the jars completely FULL. Jesus is the same way with us. This is a sign of the fact that He gives us from His fullness. He gives us ALL He has. He holds nothing back. That’s exciting to me. I hope that is exciting to you.

The wedding at Cana was a joyous time as it was for most of us who have, or had, a happy wedding. As you reflect back on your wedding or the wedding of a loved one if you are not married, remember the most important things to you. The location, the decorations, the details all were important but I would venture to guess they were not the most important. I would venture to guess the most memorable moments of the wedding of your memory included (1) looking into the eyes of your partner (or your loved ones) and seeing their undying love; (2) of being with family and friends and sharing your happiness with them; (3) of believing in your heart that God was blessing your or their commitment and (4) that they would be a part of your life/their life together, for as long as you/they shall live. Am I right or on the right track? I believe I am.

The wedding of your memory was a time when you, or those who were married, committed yourself/themselves to your/their spouse for the rest of your/their life. When we accept Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, we are saying the same thing to Him, that is, that we are committing ourselves to serve Him for the rest of our life. We entered into a marriage contract with Him. He is always faithful to keep His end of the contract up but, unfortunately, we don’t always keep ours.

I ask you to remember this day your wedding, or the wedding of a loved one, and your commitment to Jesus. At the wedding at Cana, He gave us the first sign of many that He was the Promised One of God. Let us worship Him and be faithful to our part of the marriage contract.

In Jesus Name. Amen.