

“Superabundance”

Dear friends, greetings this morning in the name of our Lord Jesus.

Most of us here today (I would imagine) have attended a number of weddings and wedding receptions. As a pastor, I've had the privilege of being involved in quite a few. And they're a lot of fun. The occasion is a joyous one. There's a lot to celebrate.

If you think about what's happening, two people are joining their lives together, in an institution ordained by God and accompanied by their love and commitment to each other. It's one of those occasions in life, one of those places (and relationships) in life, where (as we are faithful) to what God has put into place (for us), he is faithful in pouring out (on us) his blessing.

I've seen it over and over (as a pastor) and I've experienced it (for more than 32 years) in my own marriage. It's all part of the plan God has for his world. It's all part of the (created order) God has established from the start.

The commandments he gives to us (relating to marriage) are good ones, not only for the married couple (in their relationship with each other), but for society as a whole. The very fabric of any strong society begins with the family. It all starts in the home.

Now, the fact that many in our world today hold the marriage relationship (family structure) in not-so-high regard does not (for a moment) diminish its sanctity. If anything, it tends to reinforce what God has told us all along.

In the story today, Jesus' presence at a wedding feast became the occasion for the (very first) of his many miracles. It took place in the small village of Cana (in Galilee), about 3 ½ miles from his hometown in Nazareth. Jesus was there. His disciples were there, along his mother Mary, and a good number of others. And, as you can imagine, it was quite the celebration.

Now, every wedding has something unique about it; often times, something unusual. I could give you a long list from my own experience. The groom's uncle can't find the church, so the wedding starts 20 minutes late. The flowers don't arrive on time, so the wedding ceremony stops (midstream) so the flowers can be put into place. (I'm not making this stuff up.) One of the bridesmaids faints at the altar. The ring-bearer starts crying in the middle of the service. The wedding cake collapses at the reception. The pastor gets all mixed up and can't find the right place. I won't tell you about that one.

Embarrassments (during weddings) happen. It's not uncommon. At the wedding in Cana, there was an embarrassment too – to the host. (You heard the story.) They ran out of wine before the reception was finished. Mary noticed what happened (and told Jesus), and then she told the servants to do whatever he said. (And they did.)

It says there were six stone jars, each of them holding 20 to 30 gallons. They were (normally) used to hold water for the more ceremonial washing rituals in the Jewish tradition. Jesus told them to fill them up, to the brim, (and they did), and the water became wine; the very first of Jesus' miracles.

Now, there are a number of lessons in this story, as there are in almost any passage of Scripture. I believe (in this case) it's fair to say that there are not only a number of lessons (we find), but there's one “big lesson” and a number of other sub-lessons. What do you think is most important?

One lesson could certainly be the sanctity of marriage. We've already touched on that. It's sacred. It's holy. It's (an institution) ordained by God and a gift. Don't let that lesson go un-noted. Don't let what the world says about it change what we know (to be true) about God's design and intent. It's one of the foundational principles in God's creation.

Another lesson could be related to the fact that, since this was the first of many miracles Jesus performed, it introduces the whole subject of those extraordinary acts of Jesus in his ministry. Why they were done? What was their intent? What are we supposed to learn (from them) as a result?

Interestingly, (the gospel-writer) John refers to them as “signs.” That’s the word he uses throughout his gospel. (He says), “This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory (it says) and his disciples believed in him.”

Go down the list. Water into wine; 5,000 people fed, the lepers cleansed, demons cast out, sight to the blind, raising of the dead, and many more. This was just the start. The very first of his “miraculous signs.”

For what purpose? To make known God’s glory. To lead his disciples (and us) to faith. Signs (John says) pointing to Jesus as God’s Son. Signs (the apostle tells us) of the nature and future hope of God’s kingdom. Signs of deep truth.

Don’t miss it. The miracles of Jesus were never arbitrary or indiscriminate, “random acts” of kindness, as we like to say today. There was always a reason. They always had meaning. They always, in every case, (as signs), pointed to someone (or something) beyond themselves. The event at Cana was just the beginning. Water into wine was just the start.

And how about the simple fact that Jesus was at the party and that, when the wine ran out, Jesus provided more? Without getting into all of it, this whole idea that becoming a Christian takes away your fun in life? That if you hang out with Jesus, there goes your life?

I want to be careful here, because there are just as many passages in scripture dealing with the dangers of alcohol and drunkenness and addiction, as there are examples of Jesus and his followers celebrating. (We need to be careful.) We really do...but not (so careful) that we miss the point.

Having lived the Christian life for all these years and having watched others (outside) who haven’t, and having listened to their stories, there’s no comparison. If you want a good party (in life) and are looking for fun, then invite Jesus to join you, and you’ll find it. And you can (quote me on that), if you want.

Jesus included in any occasion, with or without wine, is always a more festive celebration than if he is not...and it doesn’t matter what event it is. Our world doesn’t get it and is looking for it, and is (time and again) coming up short.

Jesus was not a “drunkard and a glutton”, as he was accused of later on by those who wanted him put to death, but neither was he against enjoying life and being able to celebrate. There’s always a balance (in life), and Jesus knew how to balance life.

And what about the relationship between Jesus and his mother? There’s an underlying lesson (I believe) for us, even in that. A few weeks ago, (if you remember), we heard the story of Jesus (at the age of 12) being obedient to his parents as he was growing up. His love and affection for Mary, (his mother), without question, was there throughout all of his life. Even at the end, when he saw her standing at the foot of the cross, his heart went out to the one who brought him into this world. (We can learn from that.)

In the story (today), it’s from both sides. Mary (as the mother) shows her faith (in Jesus) in telling the servants to do what he says. And when Jesus responds, “Dear woman,” this was not a put-down in any respect. In (Jesus’ day), it was a way of honoring and showing respect. Jesus loved his mother.

And when he says, “Why do you involve me? My hour has not yet come,” he wasn’t trying to put-her-off in any way, but simply announcing that “his hour” to go to the cross was not yet here, and that his public ministry (which would last for just over three years) had now begun. We can learn a lot from the relationship they shared.

There are a number of lessons in our story, a number of sub-lessons in this text. The sanctity of marriage, miracles performed as signs, Jesus and celebration, the relationship (Jesus and Mary) shared in life. There’s a lot we can learn from this one little story.

But there’s one more lesson (in our story) that we don’t want to miss, and it’s the one (I believe) to be the central point of it all. (Just think about it.) Six stone jars, 20-30 gallons each, all filled to the brim, all filled with new wine...and not just new wine, but the best wine. Not just enough to go around, but better than anything they’d served before.

Put it together. (What’s happening?) The first of Jesus’ miracles. The first of (many signs) pointing to someone or to something else. (It’s all there.)

In Jesus, there’s a quantity of God’s grace that never ends. In Jesus, there’s a quality of God’s goodness that can be found nowhere else in this world.

The new wine of the gospel; that's what this story is about. The new wine of a life lived in and committed to Christ. That's the direction in which this first sign was pointing. It was pointing to Jesus. It was pointing to what a life in Christ is all about.

Now, you can't pour it into a glass and drink it. (It's not that kind of wine.) You can't put it in a cup and take a sip. It's too plentiful. It's too abundant. There's far too much to take in all at once.

It's like standing at the base of the Yosemite falls with an empty cup and thinking you'll catch it. (It's not going to happen with Jesus.) It's not going to happen with the life we've been given in Christ.

When the psalmist says, "My cup runneth over," this is exactly (the kind of thing) to which he is referring. In this story, we're starting to get a glimpse. There are so many passages (in scripture), to which we could point, that say the same thing.

In the first chapter of (John's gospel), "From the fullness (of Christ) have we all received, grace upon grace." (That's what it says.) From Paul's letter to the Romans, "Where sin increased, (the grace of God), in Jesus abounded all the more." (That's what we've been given.)

My friends, don't every worry about the supply (of God's grace) available to you. It's enough to drown every sin you've ever committed and ever sin (from here on out) that you ever will. The resources of the cross are unlimited, inexhaustible, they'll never run out.

We might have a water shortage (here in California) from one year to the next. (It's always possible.) What isn't (and never will be) is the reservoir of God's grace (running out) that has been poured out for us in Jesus Christ.

There's a fullness of life given to us in Jesus. There's an abundance of God's grace available to you in his Son. (Don't ever wonder.) No half-measures when it comes to Jesus. No "this is all you get" portions when it comes to Christ. The only restriction (in what's available) to us is our own unwillingness to have our cup filled.

In Christ, God has poured out himself for us. (That's the story of the Bible.) He's lavished his love upon us. (That's the story written and fulfilled in Jesus.)

Paul prays that "somehow (somehow) we will have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses all knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God."

Now, you tell me. Applicable to us, (this first miracle), and to the world in which we live? (What do you think?) We who walk around (so often) with our cups half-drained, wondering how to fill them, where to turn to make it all work. Not launching out (in faith) into the depths of challenge and commitment, but choosing (instead) to stand on the shore in the shallow water and just look. Living in doubt, when God tells us not to worry. Living in fear, when God has given us (more than enough reason) to trust. Limping (through life) when we should be leaping. Whispering (what we know) when we should be shouting it to the world. Complaining when we should be singing. Imprisoned by our own self-interest and self-imposed chains, when we should free.

You tell me, decide (for yourself) where these (more general) critiques (I've given) fit when it comes to you. I'm not saying they do. All I'm saying is that they exist (in our world) today and people are (running on empty)...but it's not because it's not there. The resources are there, and (in Jesus) they're abundant. Six stone jars filled to the brim, with an invitation (from our Lord) to do nothing else but drink.

I don't know for sure. I'm sure there were many reasons why this particular miracle (and sign) was the first of many signs pointing to Jesus. I wouldn't want to limit it to just one. But maybe (it was the first one), because it's the first sign we need, the first admonition to not try to do this walk with Jesus halfway.

Don't give it half your heart. Don't give it half of the time and energy it deserves. Go all out. Take it all in. Let Jesus pour into you his abundance, wide and full and opened up.

Because then, and maybe then, (just as in Jesus' ministry), maybe some more (and different kind) of miracles will begin to take place in our lives, miracles of the life more abundant that he promises (and wants) to give to us. That is, if we can begin to see the superabundance of his grace, his love, his mercy and his desire to give us the quality and quantity we need.

Maybe one day (looking back), after this first miracle settles in and takes hold, you'll be able to say of yourself, (just as John said of that first miracle in Cana), "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did in my life"...with many more to come. Amen.