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**Series:** It's a Miracle!

**Title:** Water to Wine

**Preaching:** Ryan Hazen, Lead Pastor, Mud Creek Campus

**Text:** [John 2:1-11](#)

**Email:** [Ryan Hazen](#)

[Watch Service](#)



Today, we begin a four-week series looking at some of Jesus' miracles. I've chosen one from each gospel because each writer had a reason for including these stories. Some of the miracles of Jesus are told by more than one gospel writer, some by only one, like the one we'll consider today. Over these four weeks, we're going to take them from the gospels in reverse order—John, Luke, Mark, Matthew, for no particular reason other than it's harder to say than "Matthew, Mark, Luke, John." It may help you remember where they are found or it may just be confusing.

The real question for the series, and really for any sermon, besides knowing our Bible a little better is "What does this mean for our lives today?" Before we dive into our specific miracle for today, let's consider three reasons why Jesus performed miracles in the first place. First, Jesus performed miracles to show compassion and meet human need. Often Jesus' miracles were not planned or calculated. They were frequently spontaneous, the result of the intersection between God's love and human suffering. Jesus coming on the scene provides us with a portrait of what God is like and how God responds to human suffering.

Secondly, it seems that Jesus performed miracles to affirm his true identity as the Son of God. One detail that stands about the miracles of Jesus is how few he actually performed. The infrequency of Jesus' wondrous acts informs us that miracles were only a small portion of his ministry. The Bible hints that the miracles themselves were not the point. The miracles actually served as "signs" pointing to a greater reality. Acts 2:22 declares that "Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God by miracles, wonders and signs." The miracles substantiated the claims of Jesus to be the Son of God.

Lastly, Jesus performed miracles to provide us with a glimpse of the world that is to come. The supernatural acts of Jesus are like a flash of lightning that illuminates a dark night for a few moments,

allowing us to see clearly. Being a Kansas boy, we knew that when there were tornados at night, you better hope there was lightning as well because that was the only way you could get a glimpse of the track of the tornado—obviously before sophisticated radar and phone weather alerts. Just when we think this life is all there is, miracles introduce us to the spiritual reality of God’s presence and love.

Jesus recognized that the hope of the world did not rest on a few isolated healings in rural Galilee but rather on the climatic miracle of his death and resurrection from the grave. The miracles, as signs pointing to the deeper truth about Jesus, should cause us to place our faith in him. When he needed to confirm his identity for a doubting John the Baptist, Jesus told John’s disciples to look to his miracles: “Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached” (Luke 7:22).

One last thing before we look at Jesus turning water into wine. We are people of reason, and as such, miracles don’t make sense to us, and we find ourselves skeptical. James Adams wrote a book addressed to where most of us find ourselves. It’s titled *So You Think You’re Not Religious – A Thinking Person’s Guide to the Church*. In it, he says, “Most of us living in the twentieth century have a hard time imagining what life was like before ‘truth’ was made to equal ‘being in accordance with the facts.’

Until after the Reformation and the dawning of the Age of Reason, people communicated trivial truths by reporting the facts of everyday life, but they conveyed significant truths through miracle stories, stories that used the poetic language of metaphor to convey a sense of awe and wonder. And here’s the best line that might inform us today: “Skeptical people might find their lives enriched if they could acquire such a sense of the miraculous in their own experience.”

Let’s start with a miracle that is reported in the Gospel of John as the first miracle of Jesus. It’s different because he’s not healing anyone. He’s not relieving suffering. OK, some of you might think that turning water into wine is relieving suffering, but you know what I mean. Perhaps you’ve seen the picture of a wine aisle in the grocery store that was mislabeled with the word “WATER” hanging over the bottles of wine. The caption simply reads, “Jesus was here.”<sup>1</sup>

In John, a “miracle” is never called a “miracle”; each event is called a “sign.” A sign is a marker for someone to confirm they are looking in the right direction. Miracles—or “signs,” to use John’s language—point us in the direction of Jesus as the Son of God. The crisis in this story is that the wine has run out at a wedding banquet. It is a problem which threatens to cut a wedding celebration short. And just for context, weddings then were a week-long celebration and not just a couple of hours on a Saturday afternoon. Running out of wine would have been a considerable embarrassment to the hosts but certainly posed no immediate danger to anyone’s life or health.

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<sup>1</sup> This picture is found all over the internet but this one from <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/464715255279563353/>

The mother of Jesus—she’s not named here as Mary—tells him about the situation. In John, we only see Mary here and at the foot of the cross. Here, Jesus seems to dismiss her request as not worthy of his concern. “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” That “hour” of which Jesus speaks in John’s gospel is always about his death, resurrection, and ascension to God. Certainly, Jesus has more important things about which to be concerned than a shortage of wine. But his mother seems to know better. Mothers often do. “His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you’” (John 2:5). She seems to know that he will do something to resolve the problem.

John tells us that there were six stone water jars which held 20-30 gallons each. I’ll do the math for you: that’s a total of 120-180 gallons. These water jars would have been there as a part of the Jewish rite of purification and the ritual cleansing of hands at meals. Jesus instructs the servants to fill each jar with water and they fill them to the brim. Without explanation of what was taking place, Jesus simply asks them to draw some out and take it to the chief steward.

Not only was it wine—and wine great in quantity—but it was also high in quality. The chief steward comments to the bridegroom, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk, but you have saved the good wine until now” (John 2:10). The chief steward does not know that it is Jesus who is responsible for this abundant supply of good wine, but his mother knows, the servants know, and we the readers know. The question remains: Why such an extravagant miracle here? This is the first of seven such signs in John’s Gospel. The sign of Jesus changing the water into wine at the Cana wedding points us to something far more valuable than the wine itself, as fine as the wine may be. It points us to the source of all life and joy.

The image of the wedding banquet is used frequently in scripture as a picture of the restoration of Israel, and wine is frequently used as a symbol of the joy and celebration associated with salvation. Amos speaks of the day when “the mountains shall drip sweet wine and all the hills shall flow with it” (Amos 9:13). Isaiah speaks of the feast that God will prepare for all people, “a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines...of well-aged wines strained clear” (Isaiah 25:6). The abundance of fine wine is a symbol of the abundance of joy that awaits not only Israel, but all people on the day of God’s salvation.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus’ extravagant miracle of changing the water into wine is a sign that in him, life, joy, and salvation have arrived. At the beginning of John’s Gospel, the narrator told us that “in him was life, and that life was the light of all people.” And later in the Gospel, Jesus will tell us, “I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly.”

The point here is about having that abundant life. It’s more than mere existence or survival, and certainly more than an abundance of material things or even good wine. Abundant life is to know and be known by the One through whom all life came into being. It is to have an intimate relationship with the One

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<sup>2</sup> Commentary help for this sermon from Commentary on John 2:1-11 by Karoline Lewis, January 20, 2013 found at [www.workingpreacher.org](http://www.workingpreacher.org)

who loves us so much that God doesn't know how to stop giving. It is the kind of life depicted by the abundance of fine wine in this story.

The signs or miracles of Jesus don't just tell you what abundant grace is; they demonstrate abundant grace. In the life of the church, we've entered the season of Epiphany. It began yesterday as the conclusion of the twelve days of Christmas was Friday. Were you counting? Epiphany means to have a revelation—an "ah-ha" moment. Turning water into wine is revealing abundant grace in this season of Epiphany. I hope it's an ah-ha moment.

And what does abundant grace taste like? Like the best wine when you are expecting the cheap stuff. It's one thing to say, "Jesus is the source of grace." It's quite another to experience it. So often we just lean toward telling people about Jesus. This miracle teaches us so much about the life of faith because it provides us with this powerful image of what a life with Jesus looks like: It is extraordinary. It is wine, not water. The good stuff, too.

It is more than what we can see, more than what we can find on our own. Life with Jesus turns our plain old water life into a rich, wonderful, bountiful life. This may not be the most needed of Jesus' miracles, or the most practical, but it is essential. It is the first of his signs, revealing his glory. What if, in the season of Epiphany, we commit to creating experiences of Jesus so that there can be no doubt that Christmas was real?

There is a poem inspired by this first of Jesus' miracles called "A Wedding Toast" by the former poet laureate Richard Wilbur. Twice he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his poetry. This poem was written for his son's wedding.<sup>3</sup> Here is his poem:

A Wedding Toast by Richard Wilbur

St. John tells how, at Cana's wedding feast,  
The water-pots poured wine in such amount  
That by his sober count  
There were a hundred gallons at the least.

It made no earthly sense, unless to show  
How whatsoever love elects to bless  
Brims to a sweet excess  
That can without depletion overflow.

Which is to say that what love sees is true;  
That this world's fullness is not made but found.

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<sup>3</sup> Found at <https://www.poetrynook.com/poem/wedding-toast>. Additional information about Pulitzer prizes from Wikipedia entry on Richard Wilbur.

Life hungers to abound  
And pour its plenty out for such as you.

Now, if your loves will lend an ear to mine,  
I toast you both, good son and dear new daughter.  
May you not lack for water,  
And may that water smack of Cana's wine.

"May you not lack for water and may that water smack of Cana's wine." That is a wonderful blessing for a couple getting married, but it's also a wonderful blessing for life. May our life smack of Cana's wine; may our life not lack for water, and may that water smack of something greater. May our life be more than mere water. May it abound with joy and with life and with love and with all that comes from a life lived with Christ. That is my hope for you. That is my hope for us as a congregation in this new year.