

Sermon Notes – January 31, 2021

(John 2:1-11)

I want to remind you that some of you may remember that my first job as a youth director was at First Baptist Church Jonesville?, North Carolina, which is up near Elkin, if you know where that is. When I first went there, I'll never forget some of the men told me, "Miss Peggy, you know that you're in Moonshine County." I said, "Well, no. I didn't know that, but ... umm." One day, there was a highway patrolman who had stopped a man for speeding on the highway in his truck. He pulled the man over to give him a ticket and he noticed that the man had six barrels or vats in the back of his truck. The patrolman said, "Sir, what's in the back of the truck?" He said, "Oh that's some water for my neighbor's animals. I had to borrow some water." He said, "Well what's that dipper over there in your seat? Let me have that dipper. I want to try some of your water." So he got up in the back of the truck, tasted the water, spit it out, and said, "That's not water. That's moonshine and whiskey." The man said, "Sir, the Lord done did it again; he turned the water into whiskey."

Well in the miracle today, Jesus turned the water into wine. Now keep in mind that Jesus took something as simple as water and transformed it into the best gift at that wedding party. In those days a wedding party usually lasted for seven days and the host family was responsible to serve food and drink for ALL seven days. Can you imagine how expensive that wedding was? The first two or three days, they usually served the best wine and the cheap wine would be served after the other ran out. Well, they are getting ready to run out of wine; Mary notices that because it's probably a family member's wedding and she's helping at the reception. She says to Jesus, "They're out of wine. It's almost gone." And Jesus says, "Woman, what's that to do with me? My time has not yet come." Now if you called your mother 'Woman' she might get a little upset, wouldn't she? It sounds condescending, but in the Greek 'Woman' was a term of endearment and respect in that day. "Woman (mother) what does that have to do with me?" Jesus was declaring his independence from his mother. Jesus was declaring his independence from his mom; he was about his father's business – God the Father's

business. And he said, “My time has not yet come.” What he meant was the time of his death and resurrection and his glory as the Savior of the world -- that time had not come yet. You see, Jesus knew that once he started performing miracles, people would come for those miracles and to be healed. And Jesus knew his time on this earth was limited. It would only be a short time before he would have to go to the cross, and Jesus wanted to preach and teach and heal as long as he could before the Jews and the Romans persecuted him on the cross. You see, he already knew what was going to happen. He’s only had his disciples for a couple of days. They had been attracted to his personality, his charisma, something about him when he said, “Follow me” – and they did. But they had not yet trusted who he was. And here in our gospel lesson Jesus chooses to perform a miracle at a wedding. Did you notice that it was not for the whole crowd? He did it in the courtyard away from the biggest part of the bridal party, and he did it with just a few servants and four of his disciples. At the end of that scripture it says that Jesus revealed his glory; he revealed his identity as the Son of God and he performed a miracle that initiated the disciples’ trust in him. This was the reason for his miracle – to reveal his identity to the disciples and to get them to trust him and believe in him.

Now I want you to see several things in this story. Number one, did you notice that Jesus operates on his timetable – not mine and yours? Have you ever prayed for something and you’ve been waiting – saying, “Lord, don’t you hear me? Don’t you care?” ***God does things on his timetable and not mine and yours.*** We don’t know how much time passed from Mary saying, “Jesus, they’ve got no more wine,” until he had the servants take the water jars and go get water and he turned it into wine. We don’t know the lax of time but most scholars believe that there was a little bit of time in there before he did that because he was establishing that it was God’s will and God’s timing – not our earthly timing. God doesn’t answer on our time table. Do you remember the story in John’s gospel where Jesus’ friends were Mary and Martha and they sent him word that their brother Lazarus was sick. They said, “Jesus, please come. Our brother, Lazarus, is sick to the point of death.” The scripture says that Jesus waited for two days before he went. By then, Lazarus had died. So Jesus

went to heal him, but he raised him from the dead. Notice -- it was two days later than those sisters wanted him to come.

Now I want you to remember the story in John's Gospel where it talks about the feeding of the 5,000. Jesus had been preaching and teaching and healing all day. It's getting close to dark and dinner time and Jesus looks at Phillip, one of his disciples, and says, "Phillip, how are we going to feed all these people? Where are we going to get enough bread for this many people?" Jesus already knew what he was going to do, but notice what he did -- "Phillip, how are we going to do it?" And in essence, Phillip said, "Lord, I don't have the foggiest idea. It would take eight months' worth of wages to feed these people." All of a sudden, Andrew (one of the disciples) comes up and says, "Lord, here's a little boy who has two fish and five loaves, but how far would that go with this many people - 5,000 people?" Jesus looks at him and says, "Have the people to sit down." And he blessed the loaves and the fishes and 5,000+ people were fed that day. You see Jesus already knows what he's going to do for you and me, but God operates on his timetable and not mine and yours.

Then I want you to notice something else in that story. Did you notice that Mary went to Jesus and said, "Lord we don't have any wine"? He said, "What concern is that to me?" And then she turns around and walks off and says, "***Do whatever he tells you to do.***" She already knew that Jesus would do something. Was it because he was the first-born son and Joseph (his dad) had already died -- and she expected as the first-born and the very responsible son he would provide? Or did she think that Jesus would do it because he was the Son of God and he had the creative power to do it? We don't really know, but she trusted that he would do it, and she went off and said, "Do whatever he tells you." I want you to hear in that story that God wants us to trust him when the path is not clear and when we don't know what we're supposed to do. Sometimes he wants us to keep doing what we're doing and trust that he is at work in our lives even when we don't see him or feel him. He wants us to trust him at all times, even when the path is not clear.

Then the biggest thing is that Jesus transformed the water into wine. That's a symbol that Jesus can transform people's lives - from sinners

to forgiven children of God. Some of you have heard the name, Leo Tolstoy. He was a Russian book author and speaker. He lived in the late 1800s, early 1900s. He wrote lots of books called, “War and Peace,” “My Conversion,” “The Resurrection,” etc. In his early years as a married man with about 10 or 12 children, he was an alcoholic and he lived a rather scandalous life. He would tell people that he was a drunk, a gambler; he lied; he cheated; he committed adultery many times in his life. He was not a nice person. But in one of his books, he tells how he came to believe in Jesus. Somebody told him about Jesus, and he asked Jesus to come and live in his life. He said, “When Jesus came into my life, it changed my direction. It gave me meaning and purpose in life. The things I used to think were good became evil, and what I thought was not so good (like going to church, God) all of a sudden became good instead of bad. God gave me a sense of peace that I’d never had in my whole life. In fact, most people would say that I was probably one of the most dramatic conversions in modern times.” Well many of us (most of us) don’t have dramatic conversions like the Apostle Paul in the New Testament or Leo Tolstoy, but we do experience transformation when we believe in Jesus. He begins to work on our attitudes and our actions. I heard a story about a young girl named Marion who attended Harvard University. One way that she paid for her education was through a Work Study Scholarship, and what she did was cleaning dorm rooms for students. The students would pay money to the college and the college would use that money to hire a student and it would knock money off their college expenses – their college education. So, Marion decided to clean dorm rooms – if you can imagine. Most of us that have been in dorms know how nasty they can be at times, but she would clean them anyway. She said that it got so bad because these students, who were so bright and well-educated, were so crude and rude. She said some of them had no manners. They didn’t know how to say “Please,” “Thank you,” “I appreciate that,” or “Would you be willing to do this?” She said that it even got so bad that two of the guys propositioned her for sex. She finally went to the Financial Aid Office and told them that she was quitting her job and she was thinking about quitting school – since it was so bad. He asked her if there was anybody that she would like to talk to – a Chaplain or someone on campus that might help her to change her

mind. She said, "I would like to talk to my Philosophy professor, who is a Christian. I really trust him and I like his class." So he set up an appointment for her to meet with the Philosophy professor. Marion went to see him and said, "Professor, we talked in this class about what is true and important and good, but how in the world do you teach people to be good?" He told her this: "The only person who is perfectly good is God. No one can learn to be truly good. The light of true goodness dawns only in the heart of those where Christ shines." Did you hear that -- the light of true goodness only dawns in the heart of those where Christ shines? You see as Christ begins to shine in our lives, he points out the things that we need to change, amend, and transform, and he begins that transforming work on us - in our hearts, our attitudes, and our actions. And for most of us, it may not be a dramatic thing; it may be a sudden change that you notice -- I'm a little more patient now than I was; I don't get angry quite as easily as I did; I don't have the desire for this like I used to. Those things begin to change and that's part of the way that God works in our lives.

So I want you to hear today that God is in the transforming-redeeming business. God works on his timetable - not mine and yours. God wants us to learn to trust him - not just in the good times, but even when we're not sure that he's there -- when times are rough to keep doing what you know you should do - to keep trusting that he's there. He wants to give you the very best.

Did you notice in the gospel story that Jesus took the water of the Jewish purification jars to use in his miracle? The Jews used those jars to wash their hands and to wash their dishes in it; so, that water was pretty dirty. Jesus sent the servants out to the well to get some fresh water - to dump the dirty out and get fresh water, and he turned it into wine. That wine was symbolic of his blood. You see -- that water is not going to cleanse you of your sin, but Jesus let his disciples know that one day his blood was going to cleanse them from sin. It was a new way of thinking - not the old Jewish way that you could wash your hands and wash away your sin. Only Christ's blood can cleanse us from the sins in our lives. Jesus gave them his best. Jesus said, "Greater love hath no man than this that a

man lays down his life for his friends.” And that’s what Jesus did for us. He gave his life, his blood, because of his love for us. It was a surprising gift – an unexpected gift. We don’t deserve it, but he gave it and it is his best.

I heard a story about a little girl named Jenna who was turning 13. She was having a party at her favorite restaurant. Her mom and dad were there - her sister, her younger brother, and her best friend. They ate dinner, and then afterwards, they were opening birthday presents. She opened one from her best friend and it was a CD from her favorite musical band. Her little brother gave her \$3 of loose change in an envelope. Her older sister gave her a gift card for Old Navy clothing store - that was her favorite clothing store. But, she was waiting until last to open her mom and dad’s gift because she knew it would be the best and the biggest and the most unexpected. She really hoped that she was going to get a hoodie that she really wanted that was very expensive. But guess what? She started to open that box and inside it was another box. She said, “Mom and Dad are you trying to be jokesters and try to pull a prank on me? That box is not big enough for that hoodie.” Then she opened that box and there was another box and another box. She finally got to this little small red velvet box and she said, “Mom that’s not a hoodie.” She said, “Honey, just open it. I think you’ll be surprised and you’ll really like it.” And when she opened it, it was a beautiful birthstone pendant necklace. She said, “Mom, Dad, I love it! I love it! I appreciate it! I will wear this every day.” And you know she wore it every day in middle school and high school. She said, “Mom I didn’t expect that. It’s beautiful.”

I want to say to you that the gift that Christ gives us is the best and the most beautiful and the most extravagant – the best that God can give – his Son and his blood for the forgiveness of our sins. God’s in the transforming business. *Is there anything that he’s still working on in your life or mine?* God wants us to remember that he works on his timetable, not mine and yours. And will we trust him even when it’s difficult? Would you remember that God gives us the best – eternal life through Jesus Christ? Amen.