

**John 2: 1-11 “I’ll Drink to That” Rev. Janet Chapman 1/19/25**

**It seems that the medical experts have changed their minds once again about the value of drinking wine in moderation for our health. It is hard to keep current on whether we should consume or not consume. With the most recent news, I can tell you that my Grandma Warner, deceased for over 40 years, is rejoicing in heaven. You see, my father’s mother was a prohibitionist to the max. She and my grandfather, also a Disciples of Christ pastor, came about it naturally because in the early-1900’s, our denomination was heavily influenced by Carrie Nation, also known as “Hatchet Granny.” Carrie married a Christian Church pastor and became an active member of Medicine Lodge Christian Church in Kansas. She grew infamous in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century for taking an ax to saloons and alcohol bottles, laying the groundwork for what would become the Women’s Christian Temperance Union after her death. Concerned about the problems that alcohol caused in their families and with no legal rights to protect themselves from drunk and abusive husbands, WCTU managed to get prohibition as the law of the land for a decade. My Grandma was a card-carrying member of the WCTU and although my father didn’t make it an issue, he was very anti all things alcohol. But please don’t mistake our logo, the symbol of the Chalice with the cross on it, as any indication of where we stand now on alcohol -the St. Andrew’s cross is simply a reference to the significance of ministry bestowed on each person and the chalice points to the centrality of communion within our tradition. But I will admit to you that growing up, us kids never saw a bottle of alcohol ever cross our doorstep. I remember one family dinner where my Grandma got off on the subject that only grape juice, never wine, should be served at the Lord’s Supper. My brother, always the devil’s advocate, spoke up, “But Grandma, don’t you remember that at Cana, Jesus turned water into wine?” Her eyes blazing, Grandma responded, “Yes! And he never should have done that either!” Grandma Warner had some spunk, let me tell ‘ya!**

**Whether Grandma approved or not, the miracle at Cana starts off Jesus’ ministry in the Gospel of John. In the other 3 gospels, Jesus begins his public ministry**

by preaching, teaching, and healing the sick; in John, he begins by turning more than 100 gallons of water into wine because his mother wants him to. Barbara Brown Taylor admits it was such an odd thing to do, but it's also an example of a typical exchange between mother and son. Mary says, "They have no wine," the same way a mom says, "The trash is full," or "We're out of firewood," and son Jesus deflects saying, "That's not our business, besides, it's not my time." But then she overrules both of his objections, such a mom-like thing, not by speaking to her son but to the servants, saying "Do whatever he tells you." Jesus caves, doing his mother's will instead of his own. He turns water into wine, which puts the party back on track, even though only Jesus, his mother, and the servants know that something miraculous has happened. How did he do it, we wonder? Six stone jars, each with a 20 gallon capacity, filled with water on Jesus' command and the next thing you know it's the finest Merlot you can taste. How do such things happen? C.S. Lewis reflected on this in his book, "God in the Dock." He writes, "God creates the vine and teaches it to draw up water by its roots and, with the aid of the sun, to turn the water into a juice which will ferment and take on certain qualities. Thus every year, from Noah's time till ours, God turns water into wine." Of course, that is the long hand answer to this question, for good wine takes time to grow, to ferment, to mature. How can you possibly circumvent that process by approximately 6 months or more? It reminds me of a story about two simultaneous conventions happening at a hotel, one was for salesman and the other for clergy. The salesman were scheduled to have "Spiked Watermelon" for dessert, but the harassed chef discovered this alcoholic treat was being served to the ministers by mistake. "Quick," he commanded the waiter. "If they haven't eaten the watermelon, bring it back and we'll give it to the salesman." But it was too late. The waiter came back to report not only had the ministers loved every bite of the dessert, commenting on how miraculous it was that this fruit had taken on such a lively flavor, but they were dividing up the seeds and putting them in their pockets. How does one take something as common as water or watermelon and spike it for the enjoyment of everyone at the party? On this Martin Luther King weekend, one scholar wrote,

**“Whereas Martin Luther King didn’t change water into wine, he did change words into the new wine of commitment.” Maybe that is how we interpret this miracle in the context of our own times? How might our words take what has been considered commonplace and turn it on its head to open up new possibilities for change?**

**Wine was a commonplace and essential commodity at any ancient Palestinian wedding. To run out of wine would have been shameful for everyone involved. There is real compassion in what Jesus does – while he is providing a sign for who he is, revealing his glory and giving the disciples reason to believe in him, he is also saving the bride, groom and their families from public humiliation. This is the common explanation Christians provide for this miracle. We need one after all because it is a bizarre miracle. It isn’t as tame of a miracle as say the feeding of the 5000 or healing of the 10 lepers. It was a restocking of the bar; it was a refueling of the revelers who had already had enough to drink. There isn’t a good tag line to go along with this story such as, “I am the bread of life” which Jesus says after feeding the multitudes or “I am the light of the world,” after he heals the blind. What should Jesus have said? “I am the wine of the party?” And we respond, “I’ll drink to that!” Doesn’t exactly have the same ring to it, does it? So Christians try to tame the story, to domesticate the miracle so it will lie down and behave the way a good Christian miracle should behave. Even if it won’t obey the laws of science, it should at least obey the laws of piety, by yielding a moral that will hold up in front of an elementary-aged Sunday School class, right?**

**It is our way of getting our head around the whole idea of miracles. Most of us have prayed for one at some time or another. Some of us are sure we have witnessed one, and we are so changed by it that we don’t care whether anyone else believes us or not. Yet we are still troubled by their capriciousness, that one should happen there but not here, to that person but not to me. Others have solved the problem of miracles by deciding there are no such things as miracles, or at least none that require supernatural explanations. Northern lights, healthy babies, DNA, dark matter are all miraculous enough, without requiring the suspension of natural law. And there is so much more logical explanations that no one has discovered yet. Whatever you think**

of miracles, the Gospels are full of them, and Christians never seem to tire of trying to count them, discount them, name them, or tame them. But a very wise person once said that is a complete waste of time. “The only purpose of a miracle is to remind you that you don’t know how things work.” Do you believe in miracles? You still don’t know how things work. Do you not believe in miracles? Maybe you don’t know how things work. Maybe it is enough to admit we just don’t know how miracles work or why, if only to let miracles illuminate the distance between certainty and faith. Taylor notes that too many Christians use the words certainty and faith as synonyms; they need to be certain of something before they have faith in it. So what do those folks tell themselves when they are boarding airplanes? Who can be absolutely certain that thing is going to stay in the air, yet we still get on board? Unless you are trained, you don’t know for sure what is going to happen next and you can live with that. You pray for a miracle, you ask for something in a heartfelt prayer, but you don’t know for sure how God will respond. You don’t know how everything works and you’re still willing to get on the plane. It’s like mother Mary in our story. She tells the servants to do whatever Jesus says, and then she leaves it. She trusts her son heard her, and she trusts him to do the right thing. More to the point, she trusts that whatever he does or does not do will be the right thing. And with that, she doesn’t say another word about it. Wine or no wine, she’s fine either way.

In all the ways that count, Jesus’ decision to make wine is the oddest part of this story. His mom has asked him to do something he clearly doesn’t want to do. The timing isn’t right; it’s not his business... but he does it anyway. He honors his mother. He saves the bridegroom from embarrassment. He makes more wine, even though it goes against his own sense of things and launches his ministry before he is ready. So many interpreters have tried to tame this story, tried to explain it away, but they have failed. Therefore, maybe the purpose of this miracle is to remind us that we don’t really know how things work. All we know is that once you ask Jesus for something, the matter is out of your hands; and when he asks you to do something, you do it – at least if you want a taste of his very good wine. I’ll drink to that!