

**Water Into Wine:
Magic, Marriage, Membership, and Communion
February 1, 2009
New Members' Service
Larry Reimer**

John 2:1-12 – The Wedding at Cana

On the third day after Jesus called his disciples there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They're running out of wine." And Jesus said to her, "Is that anything either of us should be concerned about? Why are you looking at me?" She went ahead anyway telling the servants, "Whatever he tells you, do it."

Six stoneware pots were there, used for ritual washings. Each held twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Please come and fill the pots with water."

(Wine Steward and Larry stand and pour both pitchers of water into the large urn.)

Now you, *(pointing to Larry)* draw some of the water out and take it to the chief steward.

(Larry: dips a glass pitcher into the urn and comes up with a pitcher of water.)

At that moment the wedding couple came to the serving table to inquire among the stewards about wine.

(Wedding couple steps forward and approaches the urn and the wine steward. As they approach reader B continues)

They had heard that the wine was about to run out and were concerned.

(As the wedding couple approaches the urn, Larry walks behind readers with clear pitcher of water. He "turns the water into wine" behind them. And then brings the "wine" to the steward)

The head steward tasted the water that had become wine. *(Pause while the Wine Steward pours a small amount of the wine into a glass goblet, swishes it around, holds it up to the light, takes a small taste and smiles.)*

The Wine Steward told the wedding couple, "Everyone I know begins with their finest wines and after the guests have had quite a bit to drink, he brings out the cheap stuff. But you have saved the best until now."

This act in Cana of Galilee was the first sign Jesus gave, the first glimpse of his glory. Those first disciples whom he had just called believed that Jesus was someone special.

Then Jesus went down to Capernaum along with his mother, brothers, and disciples for several days.

The water into wine is Jesus' first sign, according to the writer of the gospel of John. It's the kind of sign that is more magic than miracle. It doesn't heal anyone, or stop a storm, or even feed five thousand people who are hungry.

I'm going to talk about the places in our lives where we need magic today. I realize the difficulty of equating more wine with the magic of love, especially in a society with some much addiction and alcohol abuse, especially for anyone in recovery. So please accept the water into wine as simply the best metaphor the writer of John could come up with.

I put turning water into wine in the "messing around" category of miracle. There's a joke about St. Peter and Jesus playing golf. Peter hits a decent but not spectacular drive. Jesus dribbles the ball of the tee. A squirrel picks up the ball and runs down the fairway. As the squirrel starts to veer off to the right, a hawk swoops down and picks up the squirrel in his talons and begins flying toward the green. Just as the hawk is about to fly past the green a bolt of lightning strikes the hawk. The hawk drops the squirrel; the ball flies out of the squirrel's mouth and rolls into the cup – hole in one.

Peter says to Jesus. "Okay, are you going to mess around or are you going to play golf?"

The water into wine feels like that kind of messing around. It's a miracle ministers get tired of hearing about when wine is running low at weddings, parties, or dinners. Jokes about water into wine are retold in many forms.

There's the story about the Lutheran pastor (I don't know why Lutheran, but that's the way I heard it) who was pulled over for driving erratically. The police officer smells alcohol on Pastor Olson's breath. Pastor Olson says, "I've only been drinking this bottle of water." The officer examines the bottle and says, "That's a bottle of wine!"

"Praise Jesus," says Pastor Olson, "he's done it again."

The fact that Jesus' first miracle occurred at a wedding has been used by the church to show that Jesus supported the traditional institution of marriage. Actually, all it shows is that Jesus went to a wedding party, which in his time sometimes lasted for a week. Thus, the reason for lots of wine at this wedding and the tradition of moving to cheap wine by the end of the party.

The story also tells us that Jesus' brothers were at the wedding, which pretty much disputes out the idea that Mary was forever a virgin. But that's another story too.

Here's a basic principle for understanding miracles when you read about them in the bible. We can never know what actually happened in miracle stories. Our task is to ask what the miracle story means.

The first thing I see is that this story establishes Jesus as someone who has fun and enjoys life. Realize that most religious figures of the day were ascetics, people who denied themselves the joy of life and often led semi-hermitlike lives. John the Baptist, whose story precedes this chapter, was such a

figure. It's still the stereotype we often have of preachers – solemn, prune-faced, prudes.

In contrast, Jesus begins his public ministry by providing an extra supply of wine, and evidently very good wine. He is a trickster, like Coyote of Native American lore.

I believe that this story reminds us that there are two sides to every big decision in life such as marriage and even becoming a member in this church. The first side that we're all aware of is commitment. The second is magic.

Popular culture portrays commitment as the dreaded "C" word that sends mostly men and some women into phobic fear. It's become a running joke. (There's even a beer commercial where an attractive barmaid tells a bunch of young men that it's time for them to make a commitment. They panic. She smiles, "Don't worry, just a commitment to Bud or Bud Light." We are in a sorry state in our culture.)

I believe we do need to get past the anti-commitment phobia that seems to be going around our culture like a December flu. I believe that when a decision to become more deeply involved in a relationship or even joining the church looms before us, we are called to lean into that decision and find the meaning of going deeper.

Commitment is tough because before we make a commitment we have to step away from our childhood lives (regardless of our age) and discover who we truly are. If we don't know who we are, we can't honestly commit to someone else.

Jesus talks often about the struggle to leave our old selves behind to find out who we are and who we are called to be.

That's the importance of commitment. But in this story, Jesus reminds us that in every relationship, every commitment, every community, there must also be some magic.

That's what I want us to remember today.

I've often said that joining the church as opposed to attending as a visitor is like the difference between dating and getting married. In joining the church we promise God and each other that this is the relationship we deeply desire, that we will both give the best we have and we will be open to receive from each other in our times of joy and deepest need.

Both marriage and church membership mean leaving certain options behind. To do sustain this commitment, we also need to celebrate and nurture our new responsibilities with magic.

Where is a place in your life where you could stand to have some metaphorical water turned into alchemical wine, a potion that turns the lead of life into gold? Is there a place where the commitment is certain but the joy is fading? Is it in your marriage, your family, your work, your friendships, in this church?

In my home, and in my work, I'm as vulnerable to becoming a drudge as anyone else.

(Get out my "fun-fly stick magic wand" – Tane' plays a little background magic music. This magic wand suspends a foil striated "ball" in the air while I speak). We decided to cut back on Christmas gifts a little this year in the extended Reimer family. We drew names and limited the amount of money we were spending. It was good to do, and nobody was going to suffer. But I was a little worried about losing some magic, and Sandy knew this. So as a surprise Sandy got me this magic wand that I could bring out on Christmas or whenever I wanted, and make sure we kept magic in our family. *(Put away wand, end magic music)*

Remember that our faith has places of magic ready, a holy figure in Jesus who likes being a trickster and having fun. Open your faith to the ways that God surely wants you to find some magic. To paraphrase an old chant, "All we are saying, is give magic a chance."

For those of you who join this morning, I promise you that this church is a place that will always have surprises and even some magic. Water turns into wine here all the time. All we ask of you is that you join in the festivities. Be ready for all the good and magical times yet to come.

The same is true for all of us who have been part of this church for one year, five, ten or more. Remember your moment of standing before this congregation and sharing what you would bring to this church. Consider the gifts you have within you to share.

And be open to some magic too.

Know that without magic, commitment is dull and dutiful. And without commitment, magic is just superficial glitter. Together they are a miracle. Take that knowledge to communion, where Jesus always saves the best for last.