

Message: “More Than It Seems”

I have a modern day wedding miracle to share with you. “Donna and her mother Jean were sitting at a table as a stream of wedding guests greeted them. They were the mother and grandmother of the bride.

“Congratulations, Mrs. Smythe!” they said to Jean. “Thank you,” she would say with a smile. It was how Jean greeted each guest as they came by - not using anyone’s name unless Donna told her who they were. Donna’s mother didn’t remember them. She didn’t know why she was there. She barely knew who Donna was.

Jean had dementia. Over the past three years, her condition had deteriorated. Jean had always dreamed of her granddaughter Lauren’s wedding day. But at this point, Jean didn’t recognize Lauren anymore.

Jean sat quietly as the reception went on, smiling but not really joining in the party. Then Lauren was ready to make her entrance, and the DJ announced her as the bride. Donna glanced at her mom and saw her crying! “Mom, are you okay?” She thought Jean was in pain.

“I never thought I’d live to see Lauren’s wedding day,” Jean said. Donna was stunned. Her mom knew where she was! “Her clarity was amazing,” Donna says. Later Jean even joined the family on the dance floor. Though Jean’s awareness didn’t last, Donna never forgot that moment of lucidity.

“It was exactly what I needed,” Donna says. “I wanted to share this with her, and I got that. I felt as if I had my mom back.”

The phenomenon Donna witnessed is mysterious but not unheard of. Family members and caregivers of those with dementia occasionally report similar instances. Somehow, the person suddenly “wakes up.” They energetically speak with their loved ones, remember who the people around them are and bring up memories long believed to have been lost. This remarkable event is referred to by scholars and medical professionals as paradoxical lucidity - moments of clarity that defy logic.”¹

¹ <https://www.guideposts.org/inspiration/miracles/gods-grace/her-mother-with-dementia-suddenly-realized-she-was-at-her-granddaughters-wedding>

Alexander Batthyany, a professor of cognitive science at the University of Vienna, has been studying the phenomenon since 2013.

He hasn't been able to pinpoint what exactly causes these lucid moments. "The fact that people who were thought to be 'gone' make such a sudden [if temporary] return is currently a mystery,"² he says.

In his seven years of research, Professor Batthyany has already encountered 200 cases and believes it points to a higher trend. In an interview, he described the occurrences as "close to a miracle, given what we know about brain function and cognition."³

I believe small miracles happen all the time. We usually aren't privy to them, but they happen. It's only when someone shares the story later or when God needs to send us a message that we become aware of the greater implications of what happened.

That's what occurred at the wedding in Cana, which John records. Jesus' first miracle is interesting in so many ways. John isn't focused on genealogy or a scholarly examination of what happened.

John is answering one question: "Who is Jesus?" He's focused on the character and virtues of Jesus, rather than the time, place or order of things. John shows us who Jesus is in relationship to us.

God reveals Jesus' true nature slowly. It's like looking at a facet of a diamond versus the whole gem or following a trail of breadcrumbs. Our anticipation and joy grow each time we encounter his presence. The miracle of changing water to wine is less than the miracle of walking on water or feeding 5,000 people. Yet all are important and significant for different reasons.

Who is Jesus? John makes it very clear. Jesus is the Lamb of God, sent to save us. We hear God's voice when Jesus speaks. Jesus has an authority and presence we can't ignore. And he has the power to back it up. Jesus' power is used to do good in the lives of those who meet him. That's what this first, simple miracle shows us.

I'm going to focus on two aspects. First, the conversation between Mary and Jesus, and then Jesus' action and what it means to us.

² Ibid

³ Ibid

Let's set the scene . Jesus has traveled from Bethany to the city of Cana, in the middle of Galilee. His family was invited to a wedding feast, a sign of hospitality. In that day, wedding feasts could last for up to seven days. Jesus' mother is there. Note: this is the first time she's mentioned in John's narrative. At some point after Jesus arrives, the wedding coordinator discovers a problem: they're running out of wine.

The setting is important. Jesus' first miracle occurs during a wedding. His ministry starts in an intimate, personal, family setting. This tells us how important family is. What better way to show God's power than through an act of love and generosity when Jesus is gathered with his family and close friends?

God's Spirit is at work when we're gathered in intimate settings today as well. God is present in weddings and births and the days we celebrate them. God is present when we sit with one another, simply holding hands. God is present when our loved ones die. One of the comments most often heard at memorials is "it's great to see you, even if it's at such a sad time." God is with us whenever we gather with those we love and care for.

So Mary hears about the problem. It's a great social faux pas, so she decides to help. She says to Jesus, "*They're just about out of wine*" (v3, MSG).

Jesus answers, "*Ma'am, is that any of our business? This isn't my time*" (v4, MSG).

Mary then told the servants, "*Whatever he tells you, do it*" (v5, MSG).

I find this to be an fascinating conversation. Mary isn't asking Jesus to do anything specific. She's stating the facts: our hosts are almost out of wine. That would be embarrassing. There's a need. I'm hearing it from the son's perspective. What am I supposed to do? During our Bible study this week, the Mom's perspective was raised: Why did she ask that way? Both raise interesting questions. Faith is the undercurrent, but the way it is expressed is unusual.

Jesus says something that may seem shocking. The literal translation of Jesus' response is harsh to our modern ears, "*Woman, what concern is that to you and me?*" (v4, NRSV). The Greek term isn't translated as "Mom." It means "Ma'am" or "My lady."

Jesus isn't being rude to his mother! He's reading between the lines. Jesus gets it. His mother is asking him to help. And she's sure he'll do so, in his own time and his own way. Jesus is reminding her he isn't just her son. He's one that she – and all of us, have faith in.

Mary is acting like a true disciple. She went to Jesus, stated the need and is completely confident Jesus will do something. She doesn't tell him what to do. That's a great model for us with God and with other people. Mary trusts Jesus will act and allows him to act in freedom. No second guessing. No begging. No co-dependency.

This leads to the second aspect: God's Spirit empowers Jesus to do remarkable, supernatural acts not to impress us, but so we might see and believe. That's the point of miracles: they honor God. They open our eyes to things outside of our world view. They show us there's a spiritual, a supernatural, side to life. The disciples who were there saw. Jesus is more than just a young, cool teacher. And they truly believed in him (v11).

God doesn't exist to provide what we want, when we want it. God is not Santa Claus in the sky. God has a different view of life. What God does or doesn't do may not always make sense to us, but it's always to bring good out of bad. Paul says it this way, "... *we can be sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good*" (Romans 8:28, MSG).

A true disciple trusts God in all things. That doesn't mean we'll never have any doubts, anxiety or uncertainty. It does mean we're confident every day. Things will go as they will. We can rest, be calm and have peace, assured God will always do the right thing.

The way Jesus acts gives us a sign of who he is. Transmuting water into wine changes its nature. Water is a sign of cleansing. Wine is a fruit of the vine. Jesus is the vine. When we're connected to him, amazing things happen. Jesus shows us God's gifts have extraordinary

power. There's more than meets the eye. Jesus meets the need with abundance. Not only is there a lot of wine, it's of the highest quality!

If inanimate materials, like water, can change, how much more can we be cleansed and become fruitful? That's another sign of what it means to be a disciple: we share our relationship with God with others. When we're in love with God, we can't help ourselves. We want to share it. We want others to have the same love of God. We want others to trust God because they'll know everything will be okay. That's the power of personal, intimate relationships. Two are better than one. And, when we gather as a community of faith, there are no limits to what we can accomplish with God.

Jesus' first miracle is meaningful today. Turning water into wine is an act of turning scarcity into abundance. That's the way God's grace works in our lives. Jesus' simple, practical act was generous and graceful. It was a response to the hospitality of his host, the family that invited him to come. It was a response to the one who asked him to help with simple, confident faith – his mother, whom he loved. It was a mark, making it clear to his new disciples that he was worth their faith and trust.

God gave us a great gift in Jesus' first miracle. This opening to Jesus' ministry shows us the miraculous, life-giving power of God is at work in our lives, especially in those intimate places of human life. We don't have to view life from a place of scarcity, timidity or fear.

Jesus transforms the negative into a positive. It isn't flashy. It isn't done for publicity. It's done to show us God cares and has the will and ability to make a difference in our lives. All we have to do is believe.

Let's live lives filled with confident faith and trust in God.

The kind of life Jesus wants for us is a lived from a place of abundance, not scarcity. We use our gifts for others.

That kind of life is marked by generosity, not selfishness.

That kind of life is filled with love and hope, not fear and worry.

How will you choose to live? Trust God, believe in Jesus and spread the word.

John 2:1-12 (CEB)

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They don't have any wine."

Jesus replied, "Woman, what does that have to do with me? My time hasn't come yet."

His mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby were six stone water jars used for the Jewish cleansing ritual, each able to hold about twenty or thirty gallons.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water," and they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some from them and take it to the headwaiter," and they did. The headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine. He didn't know where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew.

The headwaiter called the groom and said, "Everyone serves the good wine first. They bring out the second-rate wine only when the guests are drinking freely. You kept the good wine until now." This was the first miraculous sign that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

After this, Jesus and his mother, his brothers, and his disciples went down to Capernaum and stayed there for a few days.