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**The Message:** Purity, Plenty, Party!

This is how I imagine it. Jesus has grown up, been an unusual child – who has on more than one occasion challenged his mother's patience. He takes off just when he was old enough to make a difference in the livelihood of the family. He shows up for the weekend with – get this – twelve of his new friends, a pretty rough lot. Mary is resigned to entertaining them, but preoccupied with plans for a wedding of a family member. She is aunt to the groom, so she reluctantly drags along this crew to the wedding – that way she won't have to feed them at home.

Perhaps their presence is enough to cause a wine shortage. At any rate, just as the party is getting going, the wine runs out. Mary notices and tells Jesus to do something about it. He says to Mary that all of this is none of his business and that he has other plans about revealing himself. His time has not come.

Mary pretty much ignores that -- some ancient authorities read, "his mother gave him 'the look'" (no not really), but she does assume that Jesus is going to be a good son and listen to his mother -- and he does. It takes someone special to nudge God.

Now, the folks who are experts on what society was like in those days make it clear that running out of wine at a wedding was not a minor social inconvenience. Weddings were three day affairs. It was not like, "Well, the wine's gone, so we have to switch to scotch." Instead, this was a major breach of hospitality; it was a disgrace and it would be devastating for the couple. Everywhere they went, for the rest of their married life, they would be known as 'that couple who ran out of wine.' The strain on their life together would be enormous. (After all, there wasn't that much to talk about in Cana of Galilee.)

So, knowing something really important, at least in the lives of the people who were there, is going on, Jesus has to decide what to do. He has to decide whether to change his timetable--whether to wait before making himself known, as he had planned, or to act right then, for that need. Jesus acts, the wedding was saved, and the bride and groom were given a new chance.

**Signs**

In the passage we heard today from John's gospel, changing the water into wine at the wedding reception in the little village of Cana is called "the first of the signs".

Have you noticed yourself seeing a special meaning in the otherwise ordinary happenings of life? You think of someone, then bump into them, and you connect the two: 'this must be important', 'I should notice this and value it as special'.

We look for signs to find meaning in the everyday. Signs give us something to talk about; they can point us in a certain direction. For me, those signs often point me toward the Spirit -- working in our lives.

So it's no surprise that John, in the first half of his Gospel, focusses on signs. This is the first in a series of events in Jesus' life that John uses to point to something very special about Jesus. Some of the signs are miraculous, like turning water into wine. Some of the signs aren't miraculous at all, like running the money-changers out of the temple.

The point of the sign isn't that it's a miracle. The point is that it's a symbolic action that says something about who Jesus is, and it makes people wonder.

The key lies at the end: "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."

What does Jesus reveal about himself?

Jesus comes to purify a tainted world.

He brought plenty to a world of scarcity.

A relationship with Christ is like a party.

### **Purity**

For some of us, the story that Jesus turned water into wine is familiar. But do we remember where the water came from? The gospel says that the water came from six huge stone jars, each holding about twenty gallons. The water was used for the Jewish rites of purification. The idea is that when you went to worship you dabbed some water on yourself as a sign that you wanted to be spiritually clean before you approached God.

Stone jars of water -- There's all this water at the wedding, but no wine for the celebration.

Jesus takes this water for purification and transforms it into wine for the wedding – purification plus.

Transformed water to heady wine.

This sign reveals a Jesus who purifies a tainted world, who purifies each of us! Ours is a Jesus of transformation. We are who we are because Jesus is who Jesus is.

The rabbis said that a cup of this water could purify a hundred people.

### **Plenty**

But Jesus didn't mess about – he didn't ask for just one of the jars; he took on all of them.

120 gallons of water

If a cup of water purified 100, how much could 120 gallons purify?

Probably all of Israel!

This sign is one of plenty!

The purification water turned into wine points to Jesus as the purifier of the whole world. Jesus brought plenty to a world of scarcity.

### **Party**

And it all starts at a party!

It's tempting in church life to evaluate our lives in terms of standards and achievements. But the story of the wedding at Cana reminds us that being a Christian is really supposed to be great fun, wedding feasts and friends and good wine, and that all of this is a sign of what our relationship with Christ is like – a party!

A party that celebrates Christ's relationship with us, a party at which the best comes last:

Jesus is present at the end of the story when the best wine is served

What is the good news of Jesus about? John's answer: It's about a wedding banquet at which the wine never runs out, and where the best is saved for last.

The first sign in John's gospel account, is a sign of joy, of celebration. It is the foretaste of the perfect society God prepares for humankind –  
purification of all,  
plenty for all and –  
a party!

And the best wine of that party will be the last - that is - "eternal life".  
Where Jesus is, there is the party.

With the presence of Christ in our lives, we are purified, offered all that we need (plenty), to live life -- even eternal life -- as a party.

Where Jesus is, the party is great!