

# When the Wine Runs Out: Finding Abundance in Crisis

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Date: 12 January 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] But as I was talking to my dad about like all of the drama of the preparations for this wedding, my dad said, well, listen, here's the thing. Like, you know, I'm a pastor. When you get married, if you choose to get married in a church, I will be happy to officiate the wedding.

I'll be really excited. I will probably cry. And I will give you 500 pounds towards the wedding. And then he said, now, if you choose to elope, I will be really sad I missed it.

I will probably cry. And I will give you 1,000 pounds. Because my dad, as a pastor of many, many years, understands that weddings are complicated.

I love weddings. And also I recognize the complications. And next week I get to officiate a wedding of some really good friends of mine who are, who I dearly love and who dearly love each other and are making a public commitment.

I love officiating and being a part of that really special day. And seeing folks and enabling folks to express their love for each other in front of their family and friends.

[ 1 : 08 ] It's a really beautiful experience. Because weddings can be beautiful. They can be an expression of the couple and their community. They can be a celebration.

A public declaration of intent and of covenant. And a joyful day of love. But over the years, I have served in, I think, every single role in a wedding.

Except actually get married. And in that process, I've seen that weddings can be fraught. They can be full of difficulty managing all of the different stakeholders.

Especially family members who think they should have a say or cannot be around each other. It's managing budgets and venues and service providers and spoken and unspoken expectations and desires.

It can be a really stressful experience. And today we're going to look at a story of a wedding found in the Gospel of John.

[ 2 : 11 ] Where things didn't go according to plan. Which, if you know anybody who's gotten married, they probably have a story or two or five of the things that didn't go to plan in their own wedding celebrations.

And this is the first time that we see Jesus perform a miracle. We're going to explore the story and look at what it means for us today at the Table Church.

And how we move forward this year. So I'm going to kind of read slash tell the story. But as I do, I want you to pay attention to the ways your understandings of weddings.

And your understandings of family relationships can color the way you read this story. I think there's a lot to find in this very simple story of a miracle.

And it can help frame how we can partner with Jesus in the upcoming year. So, we're going to tell the story and then we're going to explore it. You can find this in the second book of the Gospel of John if you want to read it.

[ 3 : 13 ] But I'm just going to kind of read slash tell it for us now. So, Jesus has just called a bunch of his disciples and they're just starting to come together. And this chapter starts that on the third day, the third day of what?

The third day after, I'm not sure. But it just says on the third day. It could be the third day of the week. We don't know. A wedding took place in Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there.

And Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, They have no more wine. Woman, why do you involve me?

Jesus replied. My hour has not yet come. His mother then said to the servants, Do whatever he tells you to do. And nearby stood six stone jars, the kinds used for Jews for ceremonial washing, each one holding between 20 to 30 gallons.

So, Jesus told the servants, Fill these jars with water. And they filled them to the brim. And then he told them, Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet. So they did so.

[ 4 : 20 ] And the master of the banquet did not taste the water. He tasted wine. And he didn't realize where it had come from. And the servants, even though they knew, they didn't tell him.

So he drew the bride broom and bridal party aside. And he said, Everyone brings out the choice wine first. And then the cheaper wine, after the guests have had too much to drink.

But you saved the best till now. Now, it's also interesting, like depending on the translation, it says he brings a bridegroom aside. Sometimes it says he just calls out, Hey, what the heck?

Everybody does this. It depends on the translation. What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory.

And his disciples believed in him. So I want to kind of start with the shame of it all. Because this wedding is probably not like the vast majority of weddings that we're familiar with today.

[ 5 : 24 ] This marriage would be less about an expression of love between two people and more about maintaining or securing inheritance and property or standing and uniting of families.

So this wedding celebration would reflect the family's capacity and their honor and standing. And what would it be like if the family hosting the wedding celebration was found wanting because they didn't manage this celebration well.

And in front of everybody, all their friends, their neighbors, their new in-laws, they ran out. Who would bear the brunt of that shame?

I mean, yes, it would be the family, but it would be the person with the least power in this situation. The new bride. So it is interesting to me to see who brings this problem to Jesus' attention.

His mother. His mother, Mary, who knows the shame that can be put on a new wife. She's been the betrothed that got pregnant out of wedlock.

[ 6 : 41 ] She knows the whispers and the microaggressions and the passive and not-so-passive actions that can be leveled at a bride found wanting. So who brings this to Jesus' attention?

His mother, Mary, who knew the possibility and the promise of who Jesus was. Do you remember the Magnificat?

Just before Christmas in Advent, Shea, one of our elders, preached this fantastic sermon on the poem and prophecy from Mary about who her child was meant to be.

Turns out, the answer to the question, Mary, did you know, was yes! With what I believe, although it's not biblically recorded, was a significant amount of side-eye, Mary literally sung about how her child was going to embody God's great mercy and upset the accepted order by bringing down those in power and lifting up the humble.

This Mary, she is the one who calls Jesus to action. And Jesus is not inclined to act. He responds, Woman, why are you involving me?

[ 8 : 00 ] Now, I've heard this sermon, this passage preached on multiple times, and I have always heard it through our lenses of mother-grown son relationships.

And it reads like this, Jesus, they ran out of wine. Woman, what does that have to do with me?

It's not my time. And then Jesus, Mary is like, all right, go do what he says. Right? But let's shake off that lens and try again.

His mother, Mary, with all she carries, her experience and understanding of who her son is meant to be and what is really at stake in this moment, she reads the room and asks him to make a move.

It's rooted improvisation in action. And his response, woman, is not a derogatory term.

[ 9 : 10 ] It's like, my lady, it's not yet my time. He knows his official mission, his plan, his trajectory, the public-facing part of who he is is not yet ready to start.

But Mary knows the stakes and she knows the character of who God is and who that is embodied in Jesus. The nature of his ministry and she knows this moment is in line with all of these.

So she takes an action of faith and she instructs the servants to obey Jesus. And in that, Jesus is moved to do something.

So he instructs the servants to fill these purification jugs with water. And this isn't normally where wine is stored. Like Antonio so eloquently prayed earlier, wine goes in wineskins or other things that hold wine.

Instead, he's like, get these big giant jugs that can hold 20 to 30 gallons and fill them to the brim with water.

[10:24] And then, he draws a cup and says, takes to the steward, the wedding emcee, and he tastes the wine and finds it so good.

And he calls out to the wedding party, dudes, this is the best wine. This isn't how we normally do it. Usually, you serve this first and then when the folks are quite squiffy, then you serve the cheaper wine.

But here in this moment, in this moment that could have been a place of shame and condemnation, instead, we get an abundance of the best getting squandered in the most extravagant way.

Crisis is averted. Honor and celebration happen in place of shame. So I want to take this a little bit deeper because that's good enough to hear kind of that sort of story.

But I wonder why this is important to us at the Table Church here in the DMV in the year of our Lord 2025, right? And I want to start by talking about miracles.

[11:30] We read a lot about these miracles that happen in the Bible and we don't often see the same translation happen in our day and in our time. And I want to talk about what I think sort of miraculousness is and where we see it.

And I think we see it at the nexus of faith and need. Faith in action and need recognized. Now, I want to be careful with this because I've known too many folks who lean into or demand miracles simply because they have faith.

And often those miracles are contrary to wisdom and reality. And it's like God should do this miracle rather than me making steps and taking actions and doing what is right.

And that's not what I'm talking about. I think instead this faith that I'm talking about that meets need is the kind of faith that sees injustice and prejudice and sees exclusion and trauma and still believes that there could be a different way.

A faith that God has a way of redemption an arc in which they are bending the universe towards justice and mercy that is an ever-flowing stream where wholehearted, abundant living is possible and everyone can walk in true freedom.

[12:59] I believe that miracles happen when people in the midst of reality, when things feel hopeless, still have the faith to imagine and believe that there is another possibility.

And it is in this place of holy imagination that we find and see God at work. So in this story we have this fully God and fully human Jesus who came to live in the midst of humanity performing a miracle and turning water into wine.

And here's my question. Was the need really more wine? I mean, yes, but also no, right?

The wine was necessary but it wasn't the point. Perhaps it was more like the vehicle through which redemption happened. It was the way the narrative about the family, about the bride, about this union was changed from one that could lead to ridicule and shame to being one of extravagant abundance.

Now, isn't it interesting that it's Mary who, from her pregnancy, knew Jesus was to be about redemption and restoration and freedom from captivity and turning the accepted order upside down, that she was the one who could see what was really at stake in this moment.

[14:37] moment. She saw what time it was and had the imagination and faith to believe that Jesus could and would change things.

And when we see Jesus' interaction with his mother, we learn something really important in this moment, that God is moved by what moves us to respond.

We are often taught that God is unchanging. The same yesterday, today, and forever. And yes, that is true.

God's character is unchanging. But our God is an infinitely creative God, a God that is and embodies the fullest and most extravagant love, the God that is redemptive, that God that chose to link themselves to humanity and is asking us to be partners in a covenant but not passive partners. We are meant to be active in this relationship. And so Mary sees this need and she takes an action of faith and the Jesus who had put the brakes on goes forth and joins her.

[15:58] Despite having told her it's not yet his time, right? The miracle in Cana is so consistent with the heart and the character of God and it's moved into being by a person of faith taking a step into a redemptive act.

So let's hold those things in our heart for a minute. What would it mean for us to be people like Mary seeing the reality of the world around us and leaning into holy imagination of what could be being firmly rooted and grounded in the understanding of who God is and who Jesus is and looking to Jesus to be with us as we take action believing that God is working in and through and around us and partnering with us as agents of creative and miraculous change?

What would that be like? And we hold this, I want you to hold this while I talk about the next part because we're going to come back to it. But I want to go to one step deeper because it's wine o'clock y'all.

I told Anthony early, I didn't have any slides for today, but what I really wanted, I love the show *The Good Place*. I don't know any of the rest of you like this. I've been watching a lot of it recently, but there's one scene where Chidi just comes undone.

He is the moral philosopher and usually the grounding point of everyone and his brain gets broken and he loses it and he goes into a grocery store without a shirt on.

[17:42] They say he needs a shirt, so he grabs his shirt and the shirt is this pink shirt and it says, who, what, when, where, wine. And I'm like, I just want that picture right there.

But I didn't because, you know, deep, serious scripture stuff, right? So wine is interesting because it is very present all throughout scriptures.

It's metaphor, it's a statement, it's an action, it's an understanding, it's a prophecy, it comes in all these places. Like, it's in prescriptions of how we give offerings to God in the Old Testament, wine was a part of that.

It's used in *Song of Solomon* to describe the sweetness of sexual intimacy. It's used in parables and illustrations by Jesus like the one that Antonio shared with us earlier.

It's used in prophecies and allusions to the Holy Spirit being poured out on everyone. It's used to connect, connect folks to creation, to the abundance of the harvest and the celebration, to the goodness of God to their people in marked times of celebrations and feasts and times of remembrance and repentance.

[19:04] And it flows freely in the end of all things when all things are made whole and new and we celebrate with God and the Lamb at the end.

Wine is all through the story of God and their people. And in this story, as we look at in this story, there are a couple things that just really stood out to me that I can't say that this is completely biblical truth, but it struck me and I have to share those connections with you.

And the first thing centers around the wine and the ritual purification jugs. It seems so interesting to me that Jesus told the servants to go grab these jugs.

He didn't tell them to go for the wineskins or the wine amphorae. He could have, but he didn't. He tells them to grab these big jugs that normally held water that everybody used to cleanse themselves and purify themselves so they were right enough to enter into either the temple, into activities to make themselves right.

And what if, what if Jesus' decision was multifaceted? It wasn't just about abundance and making sure there was a lot, but what if it was about calling God's people from a time where purification and rightness and strict adherence to the law were the only ways to enter God's presence and into a time of freedom and joy and abundance, away from shame and into wholeness.

[20:54] And like Jesus said later in his ministry, he said, I have come that you may have life, abundant life, and have it to the full. What if the transforming of the water in these jugs was one more statement about moving from the old covenant to the new, where the spirit of the Lord is poised to be extravagantly wasted on all?

What if? Right. And also, isn't it really interesting that this first miracle and Jesus' last real interaction with his disciples before he is crucified both see wine play a significant role.

Wine is offered in Cana, and in this wedding it rewrites the narrative of shame, and in the Last Supper it is offered also as an abundant gift for all.

It is offered to the one who's about to betray Jesus. It's offered to the one who was going to deny him three times, and to all the disciples, the ones who were ultimately going to continue God's mission of reconciliation.

It was a gift freely given, an act of redemption and restoration, an act that heralded a fundamental shift in the way we see and can be in the presence of God.

[22:24] What if that's what's going on here? What would that mean for us today? When we come around the communion table today, which we'll do in a few minutes, if we remember this possibility,

that wine represents a move to wholeness and away from shame, and that the wine represents abundance and an invitation to partnership with God.

God, I asked you earlier to hold some things in your heart, asking you all to imagine how it would be if, like Mary, we had our feet firmly planted in what is and our hearts turned towards what could be, and taking action, believing that we are partners with God, and God will join us in acts of justice and redemption and resilience and restoration.

I know when I ask myself this, part of me dreams big and sees what can be, and the other part of me is stone cold cynical.

I go, right, sure. I often wonder, how can I tell that God is working when I see what I see?

How do I know that Jesus is here? Well, woven in and through this wedding story at Cana, and the miracle of turning water into wine, we see that where Jesus is, there is a physical manifestation of a deeper truth.

[ 24 : 14 ] The wine is important, but it's kind of not the point. I love that we, like Mary, get to be the ones who can see what is really at stake and step into our roles as partners with God in the restoration of all things.

A true partnership where people who are learning to believe that God's mission is for here and now in this time. Literally, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

So how can we tell that Jesus has been here? It is an abundance of the best wine literally and figuratively. It's grace and mercy lavishly given at an unexpected time.

It's extravagant love. It is a step into faith that a different way is possible. Not only possible, but something that we can partner to build, it is the deeper truth that where Jesus is, there is no shame, but instead redemption, honor, joy, celebration, and extravagant love.

Pray with me. God, as we come to your table, as we are preparing to remember what you have done, well, let this not just be a passive moment where we come and partake, but let it be a moment where we begin to realize like Mary that we are working with you and that as we do, we can move your heart as our hearts are moving.

[ 25 : 57 ] Lord, let us remember that this represents not only sacrifice, but it represents abundance, that it represents extravagance, that it represents something of great value being squandered in the best way.

Let your joy, not the joy that ignores what's going around, not the joy of not paying attention, but the deep joy that knows weeping exists and suffering exists, but knows that you are here with us in this, working with us to see your kingdom come and your will be done here.

Let that joy permeate us as we come to your table. In your name we pray. Amen.