

### *How's the Party Going?*

This is a story for New Year's Eve, or fraternity houses, or high school reunions, or Friday happy hour -- a story with a crisis appropriate for those occasions. There is a **wedding party** in Cana, the wedding feast lasting the traditional 7 days with fresh guests arriving each day to join the celebrating. Wine flows freely. But they run out of wine. This not only threatens to stall the party, but bring embarrassment and disgrace upon the hosts. The wine gives out.

**How is the party going for you?** Life is created to be a party (so claims Genesis): "created as paradise, gift, joy, enjoying God forever, with buckets of blessings... health, friendship, happiness. Call it a party! But "between the idea and the reality, falls the Shadow"<sup>(1)</sup> -- disobedience, doubt, disease, divorce, dread news, discouragement, death -- life out of balance, out of sequence, out of whack. Out of wine. *How's the party going for you?*

At a wedding in Cana, the wine has run out. The party is in trouble. Jesus is there. This, according to John, turns out to be the inaugural event of Jesus' ministry. It is three days since Jesus told his new disciples that they would see great things following him. Jesus' mother is also there, prompting him, "They have no wine." Jesus responds, "This is not yet my hour." But he does something anyway. In John's Gospel, it is always *Jesus' hour*. This is the first sign of who he is, and every sign points to his glory. Jesus brings the glory of God to us. The promises of God become flesh in Jesus and dwell among us. Jesus orders stone jars to be filled with water, then suggests that the wedding planner have a sip. Wow! What is going on here? Where did this come from? Wine! And not just wine... this is the good stuff!

The point of the story: not the miracle, nor the wine per se, but Jesus transforming water into wine. The point is *who Jesus is*. Some saw the glory, and believed.

This story is told in a lean way, without details, except for the jars. We learn a lot about the jars: composition, stone... size, enough for 20 or 30 gallons each... how many, six... purpose, to hold water for the Jewish rites of purification, which allowed people to draw near to God. But 120-180 gallons? The Talmud (Jewish teaching which interpreted the Scripture) said one cup could be enough to purify 100 men. Here are 120 or more gallons of water turned into wine! Enough for everybody here, and the whole county, and more! Maybe John means enough for *everybody*.

Jesus saves the party. God created, and it was good. Then it wasn't good. Who is Jesus? He is the One who saves the party. It is a lot of wine, but it is not about the wine. This story and party are here even for non-drinkers to pour out. Jesus transforms water into wine. Jesus himself is the purifying water who brings us close to God. He brings us God's abundance, God's new possibilities, God's new life. *Watch for the wine*. I was in a cashier's line at a gas station this week observing people buy lottery tickets. Why? Maybe as an investment, or entertainment.

But it struck me, watching, as more a hope to get the party going again, the electricity back on, new TV, maybe a cruise. John reveals something different: Jesus is the one who saves the party.

Read Jesus as the One who has come into the world's sin, evil, pain, sadness, death... to keep the party going! To keep the *joy* in living. To bless us with extravagant gifts of strength, mercy, forgiveness, assurance, hope. Gallons and gallons of wine... superabundance. In the Old Testament, "good wine" is a symbol of God drawing near, a sign of the fulfillment of our hope in God. Jesus transforms this water into good wine, great wine, by the gallons. *Watch for the wine.*

How is the party going for you? Is the wine running low? Got any containers of water handy? Jesus is the guest who says "Yes" to joy and gladness. He brings the holiness of God to spunk up our lives -- not just looking on the bright side, seeing the cup half full, counting our blessings, attitude adjustment -- but power to transform life in extravagant ways. He promises to do that for you.

Jesus brings life. We see the glory, life breaks out, abundant life. It is not always the healing we want, the success we seek, the outcome we pray for, or the answer we desire. But **life, gallons and gallons of life:** grace abounding, love poured out, mercy overflowing, "In him was life," (Jn 1:4), "and the life was the light of all people," abundant life, the life we need, life transformed: Jesus changing water into wine. "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." (Jn 1:16) *Watch for the wine.*

"Toast the world with the amazing good news of grace" a preacher advises.<sup>(2)</sup> Christians ought to be celebrating constantly, liberated as we are "from the fear of life and the fear of death," adds another.<sup>(3)</sup> How's the party going? *Watch for the wine.*

The wedding in Cana, the 1<sup>st</sup> sign that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life...  
he is God's glory with us,  
he is the wine that fills us with God's goodness,  
and the power that can transform the emptiness into new wine...  
the one who keeps the feast of God's grace supplied, the party of God's love going.

And so, a toast! I raise my water bottle in toast: to Jesus. I give you Jesus. *Watch for the wine.*

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- 1) T.S. Eliot
- 2) Robert M. Brearley
- 3) Robert Hotchkins, quoted in The Ragamuffin Gospel, by Brennan Manning

