

SEEING IS BELIEVING - WINE  
A SERMON BASED ON JOHN 2:1-11  
PREACHED AT CHIPPAWA PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO  
SUNDAY, MARCH 8, 2020  
10:00 a.m.

This account is the start of Jesus' ministry.

It is only chapter 2 in the gospel of John.

We have just met Jesus.

Just recently introduced in chapter 1, we barely know him.

At this point in John's account of Jesus' life,

Jesus is basically a stranger.

After just a few words from Jesus in chapter one

this is John's chance to get us acquainted with him.

I remember reading a book about movie editing and movie scripts  
a while back.

The author made the point that in many movies,

the director, script writer and editor

will often immediately let you know,

whether you are supposed to like a character or not.

They want you to know who to cheer for.

They want you to know

who the good guy is, and who the bad guy is.

You are often told what you should think

by what happens the first time you lay eyes on the character.

You first see her in a restaurant.

But, she is being rude and snippy to her server.

Well, it's clear you aren't supposed to like her.

You first see him on a busy street.

It's clear he's late and trying to catch a cab.

But he notices a child near tears, chain off his bicycle.

He stops.

Bends down to help a child get his chain back on his bicycle.

You know he's a good guy.

It's how movies let you know who you are dealing with.

Kicked a cat? Bad guy.

Stopped to pet a dog. Good guy.

Watch for it in movies.

They'll often tell you right away.

So here we are the start of John's account.

This is John's chance to introduce us to Jesus.

What scene would you create to let the world know about this guy?

How would you introduce him?

If it is the start of Jesus' ministry,

Why not make a great, amazing introduction?

Why not start big?

Why not have John tell a story with impact?

Assemble the largest crowd ever seen,

and maybe bring some who are dead back to life.

Maybe have Jesus shake the earth with an earthquake or hailstorm.

Maybe have Jesus levitate in front of everyone,

reveal something that makes him clearly from beyond.

It seems like a good way to get yourself known.

It would definitely create a strong first impression.

This guy, is God's son.

John takes a different approach.

The way John starts Jesus' story is in Cana.

Cana was no metropolis.

It was a small village, a bit of a backwater, off the beaten path.

It was the place you went through on your way to somewhere else,  
but you only went through it if you were taking the back roads.

In this little village in the middle of nowhere,

Jesus went to a wedding,

with his mother and some of his disciples.

They ran out of wine at the wedding.

Jesus' mother was concerned. She let him know.

It was at this wedding,

Jesus' mother said to Jesus,

'They have no more wine.'

They have come up empty.

And in the way only a mother can,

she communicates the expectation to Jesus,

that he should do something.

She doesn't say what, or how, or when.

But there's the look. A mother's look.

And her look says, 'Do something.'

Without any fanfare,

without making a spectacle of himself,

Jesus told the servants to fill the stone jars with water,

and then draw some out,

and take it to the man in charge of the banquet.

Which they did.

The master of the banquet called the bridegroom over.

This wine!

This wine is outstanding.

Most people use the best wine at the beginning of the banquet,

it makes a great first impression.

Then when the guests have had too much to drink,

like now,

then you bring out the cheaper stuff.

But you have saved the best until now.

The best until now.

That's what John wants to be our first experience of Jesus.

This is what John brings to us when he says,

I'm going to tell you a story about Jesus.

Chapter two. start of the ministry.

First impression. First scene where Jesus acts.

Wine.

You have saved the best until now.

I love that sentence.

That's what John wants you to know.

The best until now.

We've titled this series, 'Seeing is Believing'.

We've used the image of an iceberg in the graphic.

We've used the image to remind ourselves

that sometimes what we are seeing,

is just the tip of the iceberg so to speak.

There can be much more going on below the surface.

Today we see wine at the surface of things.

At the surface it is only a neat miracle. Water to wine.

But John knows this is so much deeper than that.

At this wedding, in Cana of all places,

John shares Jesus' first miracle.

Except John never actually uses the word miracle in his gospel.

A miracle could be just a neat trick, or a special power.

John says this is more.

He uses the word sign when Jesus does something miraculous.

A sign provides direction to something,

names something, identifies something, labels something.

A sign tells you what it is, or where you are going,

or how to get to where you want to go.

Here at a wedding in Cana,

is where we are given a first impression of Jesus and his ministry.

This is where John points in order to introduce us to Jesus.

Here is the sign.

Water to wine.

Cool, intriguing, but not exactly a show stopper.

I expect many people there barely noticed what had happened.

When everyone is already tipsy, lost, confused,

who knows what they saw,

or if they could even taste the difference in the new wine.

It seems like an odd way to introduce Jesus,

to introduce his ministry.

It doesn't appear to make much of an impression at all.

On the surface,

Jesus demonstrates that he has power and authority

over the elements.

Water to wine. Jesus is powerful.

But there is more going on here.

It goes deeper.

Because this isn't just a miracle,

this is a sign.



There are intriguing elements in this story,  
things that, when you understand them,  
bring the story and help you dive to the deeper level of meaning.

There are aspects, that are sort of like clues,  
things that if you know about them,  
they can help you read the sign.

The stone jars at this wedding weren't just random jars.

They had a purpose.

They were used for purification rites.

When a guest arrived at the house for the wedding,

a servant would provide water from these stone jars,  
for washing.

These jars were huge, about the size of a rain barrel,  
holding 20 to 30 gallons.

The fact that they were made of stone and not clay,  
means they were the best.

These were the granite countertops of jars.

John makes a point of telling us there were six stone jars.

It is his next clue to the deeper meaning.

Seven is the number

that symbolizes perfection and completion in the Bible.

Six stone jars means that something is not quite complete here.

Something isn't finished.

This religious purification system,

this washing, wasn't quite complete.

Jesus told the servants to fill these six stone jars to the brim.

When they finished,

he told them to draw from them,

and take a sample to the master of the banquet.

The master of the banquet tasted fantastic wine.

There was a lot of it, six rain barrels full.

The master of the banquet said to the bridegroom,

you've saved the best until now.

This is the first sign.

This is the introduction.

Wine is just the tip of the iceberg.

The first thing John wants you to know about Jesus is  
the best starts with him.

When Jesus shows up, it is the start of the best.

A new start filled to the brim,

flavourful, a wedding banquet of excellence.

A banquet where Jesus provides the best.

This first sign, this first impression,

leads us, shows us, labels for us, directs us to the fact

that Jesus can fill what is flavourless and colourless,

he can take what is incomplete

and fill it to the brim,

with better than you've ever tasted.

I like to think Mary saw into our lives,

as well as the situation at the wedding.

'They have no more wine.'

Their lives have gone dry.

We know it happens, coming up empty, coming up with nothing.

We pull from the well that is our souls too often,

much is required of us, emotionally, spiritually, physically,  
and we run dry.

We pull from the well to give our all at work.

We come home tired, a little cranky, a little dry.

We drop our bucket and pull again from the well  
to give more at home.

Pull from the well, to give to the kids,

get the laundry done, get them out to lessons.

We realize with all we've given at work and for the kids,

we haven't given as much to our marriage, or other family,  
so we drop the bucket and pull from the well again,  
this time we have to reach a little deeper,  
wait a little longer for the bucket to fill.

Life changes so much because of retirement, death, moving,

that we lose our bearings a little and have to figure out  
who we are, and what we are doing, again.

Our health concerns mean trips to doctors, and tests

and more appointments,

and the worry, and the energy,  
and the keeping a brave face on it all  
means we have to pull from the well again,  
and we reach a little deeper  
and wait a little longer.

Each part of life comes along and asks more of us,  
and so we reach a little lower and a little deeper,  
until one day,  
we drop our bucket down into the well,  
and don't hear a splash,  
but a dull thud,  
and the scratch of the pail on stone.

And there's nothing left.

We've gone dry.

I can tell you,

I have stood in places where I want Jesus to just do something.

You have stood there too.

It happens to all of us along life's journey.

We've come up empty.

They have no more wine.

But I firmly believe, and have experienced,

that when God's people gather,

and are genuinely seeking to meet him,

God is faithful and will show up,

somewhere, somehow,

sometimes in a song, or a phrase in the sermon,

or in the Scripture lesson itself,

or in the hug from a member in the church.

God is faithful to show up in worship,

for those genuinely seeking him.

But we can be guilty of forgetting.

We fail to hear that Mary has already said to Jesus,

'They have no more wine.'

When we forget that Jesus is standing right there.

We forget that he's got this.

And we try and solve it ourselves.

I remember being on vacation at worship one time,

in a dry place, cranky, and tired.

I was annoyed that the preacher was buzzing through

a huge list of Bible verses with no context.

But then a Scripture verse came up on the screen,

one of a gazillion this preacher was quoting,

but the one God had intended for me to see that day.

Jeremiah 2:13

“My people have committed two sins:

They have forsaken me,

the spring of living water,

And they have dug their own wells,

broken wells that cannot hold water.”

They have forsaken me.

They have dug their own wells that don't hold water.

When Jesus is standing right there.

I repeatedly have to find my way back to the wedding.

So do you.

Never mind water, there's wine there.

Jesus brings the best.

Trying to dig our own wells,

trying to draw a little lower and a little deeper,

inevitably we will hear the pail scrape against the wall.

Mary said to Jesus,

"They have no wine."

She said to the servants.

'Do whatever he tells you.

And Jesus provided the best,

in abundance.

Do whatever he tells you.

The steward said to him.

'You've saved the best til now.'

It is no coincidence that John tells us that this first sign of Jesus



took place on the third day,

the third day is a very biblical day.

The third day Jesus rose from the dead.

The third day is a day for rising to new beginnings.

Jesus takes water and makes it wine.

Bringing the best, now,

Draw deeply from the rich abundant life Christ offers.

Jesus' mother didn't know what exactly Jesus would do.

But she knew he would do something.

She said to the servants,

“Do whatever he says.”

The wine is just the tip of the iceberg.

Doing what he says,

that's what bring the best.

In Scripture reading, in prayer, in worship, in serving,

in obedience, in showing and receiving love,

in showing and receiving forgiveness,

in giving and in allowing yourself to receive

all that Christ is, and offers and teaches,  
you can learn what he says.  
You can do what he says.  
You can pull from the deep,  
and have the best wine ever.

Jesus is standing right there.  
He offers, he is, the best, now.  
Taste and see that the Lord is good.

Amen.