

A Day in the Life sermon series
Partying with Jesus - John 2:1-11
February 13, 2022
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Did you know that tomorrow has a very special name? It's called Super Sick Monday. Kind of an odd name for a day, right? Why would it be called that? Well, because it's the Monday after the Super Bowl, a day that regularly ranks in the top 10 days people call in sick to work. Combine the last football game of the season with an abundance of alcohol and greasy bar food, and you have the recipe for phantom cold symptoms a much-needed day off.

I wonder what Jesus would think about this, a whole host of people skipping their responsibilities because they got a little too rowdy the day before. Well, based on our story today, I think Jesus would be sympathetic. After all, as we learn, not only did Jesus attend his share of parties, but he wasn't afraid to let the booze flow when it was called for.

This is not the Jesus we are familiar with. Not that Jesus is a teetotaler, but we just don't picture our savior tipping back a glass of vino at a social soiree. And yet, as we have learned during this "A Day in the Life" sermon series, Jesus was just as human as any of us – minus the sinning and the calling in sick to work. What do we make of this Jesus, who not only attends a wedding reception, but uses his miraculous powers simply to make sure everyone is enjoying themselves?

This story, which is only in John's gospel, is the first of what John calls the "signs" of Jesus, miraculous acts which point to Jesus' true divine identity. The other signs directly benefit others, like healing them of diseases, saving them from storms, even raising Lazarus from the dead. But changing water into wine? Maybe a cool sleight-of-hand trick for a magician, but why include it as one of Jesus' miracles? I could see God saying, "Wait, you used your powers for WHAT?"

To be honest, I don't know that Jesus meant this to be his first sign. I think he was forced into it, and there's one person to thank for that: Mary. We may not get it on the surface, but this really is one of the funniest stories in the Bible. Jesus and his disciples are invited to this wedding, but first we're told that Mary is there, which tells me this wedding was probably for Mary's friend, not Jesus'. His invitation was more perfunctory, an obligation of the host because he was Mary's son. You can hear the bride and groom haggling over this decision: "Mary is Mom's best friend, we have to invite her, but do we have to invite her son Jesus? I barely know him, he's kind of weird. He'll probably want to talk religion the whole time. And you know he's going to bring his 12 friends with him. Our flowers are costing a fortune, I'm not paying for 12 guys I don't even know!"

But Jesus does get invited, and it's a good thing he shows up, because at one point, Mary comes up to him and says frantically, "They've run out of wine!" Major faux pas in Jewish culture. Hospitality was a core value, and to run out of wine for your guests was incredibly embarrassing. Because these are her friends, Jesus' mom expects him to do something about this, maybe because his 12 friends have already done more than their share of drinking.

I love that Jesus gives the most human response: "Woman, what concern is that to you and me?" In other words, "Mom, I'm off the clock. I'm here to party, not to work. If

they ran out of wine, that's their problem, not ours." It's interesting to see the human Jesus respond in such a snarky way, isn't it? But I get it. It's like when I'm at a party and someone who doesn't know me finds out what I do for a living and asks a deep, theological question. Look, friend, I love talking about God as much as the next pastor, but I really just want to eat some wings and watch the game. Can we talk about this Sunday?

But Mary will not shrugged off so easily by her son. The next line says that Mary told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you," which means she knew he would take care of this. What the scripture doesn't describe is the look Mary gave to Jesus when he tried to beg off. You know that look, don't you? It's the look God gave to mommas and teachers, and we've all been on the receiving end. Can you imagine a look so stern, so pointed, that even the son of God will obey? No wonder the Catholics pray to Mary!

So Jesus does as his mom says and changes the water into wine. Not just any wine, mind you, but the finest wine, so fine that people remark how unusual it was for the host to save the best wine for last. A good Jewish wedding host and Martha Stewart both will tell you that you serve the good stuff first, and then when everyone is too schnoekered to tell, you serve the cheap wine. This was highly unusual.

But let's be clear: this story isn't about the wine. That's important for a couple reasons. First, there are people who have a problematic relationship with alcohol, so we have to be careful not to mandate wine-drinking as a part of following Jesus. This story is not glorifying alcohol. We also know this isn't about the wine because John tells us that the disciples saw what Jesus did and believed in him, so there's more going on here than Jesus restocking the bar.

It's important for us to know that in the Jewish culture, wine was a symbol of joy, the reminder that life was meant to be lived and experienced to the fullest. I've not been a wine-drinker until recently, when my wife Amy has helped introduce me to some wines I like. There's a new couple in church who are wine experts, and they had us over one night to sample some different wines to show how the pair with foods to bring out the flavors and textures. I had a wonderful time, not because I was drinking wine, but because I was sharing this experience with my wife and our new friends.

That's the life Jesus wants us to live, a life full of joy, and this story symbolizes that. Remember how much wine Jesus made. He had six stone jars filled with water. We're told these jars were used for ritual cleansings, which means they would have contained unclean water, bits of dirt and dust floating in it. Yet Jesus changes that water into rich, sparkling wine. And not just a few bottles, either. He fills each jar to the brim, about 120 gallons of wine! That abundance of wine symbolizes the abundance of life that Jesus brings, the fullness of God's grace, which is more than we'll ever need. With that much wine, our cups would overflow.

Is Jesus still working this miracle today? I would say he is. That was confirmed for me by a greeting card I received not too long ago. The front shows a police officer talking to the driver of a car, who's a priest. The officer says, "Sir, have you been drinking?" The priest replies, "No sir, only water." The officer looks in the car and says, "Then why does your water bottle smell like wine?" And the priest exclaims, "Praise Jesus! He's done it again!"

OK, I'm not sure Jesus is still doing miracles in that way, but I do believe he is still showing us the importance of joy in our lives. There hasn't been a lot of joy these

past two years, has there? Everything feels heavy, gray, like the sun has stopped shining. But this story reminds us that Jesus has poured out joy in our lives, 12 jars full, filled to the brim and overflowing. We can either choose to see Christ's joy or we can stay focused on the things that rob us of that joy.

Can we take just a moment to appreciate that Jesus does his first sign at, of all places, a party? Christians often get a bad rap as being dull and boring, that a life with God is anything but fun or entertaining. But as we at this church know, that's just not true. Joy is a defining characteristic of the Christian life, and if we do not have that as part of our daily living, then we are missing out on a fundamental element of Christianity. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, once said, "sour godliness is the work of the devil." We are not called to serious about our faith, but we are not called to be serious.

That's the beauty of this story. Not only does it remind us of the joy Christ brings us, but it reminds us that he brings it in abundance. Twelve jars filled to the brim with joy! The good wine is poured out like the Holy Spirit is poured out, and each of us are vessels ready to be filled with God's joy. There's only one person who can put a lid on it, and that's us. What's capping your joy today? What's robbing you of fully enjoying what Jesus has given you, what Jesus has done for you? Maybe it's time to take a break from worrying about it and throw a little party.

What I take away from this story is that the human Jesus enjoyed a good party, was intimidated by his mom, and lived life abundantly. What a gift! Jesus says later in John's gospel, "I have said these things to you so that my **joy** may be in you, and that your **joy** may be complete." We have Christ's joy in us! If you're not finding joy in life right now – and let's be honest, it's not always easy to find – then you might benefit from remembering that Jesus wants you to be joy-full, for your joy to be complete. You might find that in a glass of wine or in a good conversation with new friends or in a can of soup given to feed someone in need. Despite what this world tells us, Christ's joy is within us. Twelve jars filled to the brim. Life is gift from God to enjoy...so enjoy it!