



Rev. Glen McCrainie  
Second Sunday of the Epiphany – John 2:1-11  
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Have you ever tried to drive a car on empty? When our oldest son was two years old, he was a patient for twenty days in the local Columbia, North Carolina hospital. Vi had been visiting her parents in Manns Harbor when he became sick. Vi stayed by his side while I worked in Valdosta, Georgia. After consultation between the Columbia doctor and my hometown pediatrician doctor, the decision was made to transfer our son to the Valdosta hospital. I drove up from Georgia in our new Chevrolet Corvair to get Vi and our son and then we were to drive directly back to Georgia. We departed the Columbia hospital heading to Manns Harbor to pickup Vi's clothes before heading to Georgia. Somewhere between East Lake and Manns Harbor, the oil pressure light came on. The plastic seal for the oil pressure switch had blown. Engine oil had been forced out the hole and a sudden stop was necessary to save the engine. We were then parked by the road between East Lake and Manns Harbor with a sick child and our car was out of oil. What occurred beyond that event is another story and is one of the reasons which led in the process of life of Vi and I have being at New Hope Church for these past Sundays. When you are suddenly out of that which you personally depend or need, then your present situation can rapidly change. Haiti is a prime example of sudden change due to the earthquake. This change is the focus of today's scripture about Jesus being at a wedding in Cana.

Been to any good weddings lately? Attendance and participation in weddings is often fun and sometimes expensive. Most of us remember our own wedding. We may even remember the date, place, location, name of the minister, and some of the participants. Vi even remembers the songs that were sung. I only remember the bride's name. Often times there are small or large mistakes made at weddings which set them apart from other weddings.

People spend large amounts of money on weddings for special clothing such as tuxes, gowns, renting a social hall, food, music, etc. Weddings can sometimes deplete the family's savings account. One father spent \$65,000 on a reception for his daughter and his future son-in-law skipped town the day of the wedding. Another father spent \$20,000 on a staircase descending from a pink cloud for his daughter to walk down into the arms of the groom. The groom also fled town the day of the wedding. I guess the moral of these examples could be, fathers of the bride, don't spend a lot on money on your future son in laws...Just kidding.

Neither money nor fame insures a successful wedding or marriage. Elizabeth Taylor and Larry King have worn a hole in the carpet standing in front of a minister due to sixteen marriages between them. One woman buried four husbands by age fifty-four.

This Sunday's New and Old Testament scriptures concerns marriages. In the New Testament, Jesus and the disciples are invited to a wedding in the city of Cana. Cana is the hometown of Nathaniel, one of the twelve apostles. Weddings in the time of Jesus were longer than an afternoon and more than peanuts and mints were served. Weddings were the second largest community events. The first was religious festivals and then weddings. The community turned out for these events. The family spent large amounts of money for weddings. In the parable of the ten wise and foolish virgins waiting for the bridegroom, which Jesus tells, the family pays for those young ladies to wait. No expense was

too great for a wedding. Weddings would last for a week and the family paid for the food, drink, and lodging. It is said that ancient Egyptians spent a life time preparing to die in building their pyramids and tombs. Well, Jewish families spent a life time saving their money for weddings.

Jesus and his disciples did not arrive at the wedding until the third day, so the festivities were in full swing. There was dancing, singing, lots of food, laughter, talking, and wine.

The wine was fermented wine not grape juice. This was before the time of Welch's grape juice and juice would spoil in the heat of the middle east. Wine was used during the summer instead of water for water was scarce and sometimes unclean.

The family hosting the wedding ran out of wine which was a social no-no. To run out of food or wine at a wedding was a great social insult to your guests. It showed the family was unprepared and could change the whole dynamics of the wedding reception. Even today, if we invite guests for a meal, we over prepare for we do not want to run out of food and be embarrassed due to someone leaving our table hungry.

So Mary, the mother of Jesus, tells him the wine is gone. It is unknown if Jesus only knew the family or was related due to the Mary's concern that the family not be insulted. The family was in deep despair for the family's name could be damaged. How could the moment be rescued from this social insult?

So the servants brought six large jugs of water. Each jug held about 20 gallons of water. This was wash water. It was to be used to wash the hands and feet of the guests for religious purification as they entered the home. Jesus changed the water into wine for the family. This was His first recorded miracle. Jesus made great tasting wine out of wash water.

Our Old Testament text deals with the return of the Jewish people to the destroyed city of Jerusalem. The temple is in ruins. The nickname of the proud people of Judah is now "forsaken". the people are in need. There is no joy in their hearts as they survey their city with grass growing in the streets and sheep and goat herds gazing in the temple. They are in great despair. Isaiah states there is a deep darkness over the land. There is no joy. There is no dancing. There is no food. There is no wine.

The darkness Isaiah stated in his text could stand for darkness in our day. It could be the darkness of despair where we see no joy due to a life changing event. It could be the darkness of depression that wraps its arms around us. It could be the darkness of middle age crisis. It could be the darkness of marital strife which impacts upon immediate and extended family members. It could be the darkness of professional crisis as decisions must be made concerning future employment or loss of a job. It could be a spiritual darkness when the face of God is covered and no light shines through.

In this darkness, there is little joy. We cry out as the Jews to God: It seems that God has forsaken us.

In that silence, God is suffering with us. The message of Isaiah and the wedding feast is for us. They are the words of joy and words of hope in our lives. When everything goes wrong, even when there is silence, we know God is with us and he changes our name from "forsaken" to "delight" of the Lord". It is not wine changing, it is life changing.

When Jesus turned the water into wine, it would seem that 120 to 180 gallons of wine would be an extreme. That is a lot of wine by any measurement. The miracle is not the changing of the water into wine at a wedding to save the reputation of the family. This is not the miracle. The miracle is the abundance of God and transformation power. Not only does Jesus provide what is needed, He over provides to show the abundance of God. The miracle is to reveal how God blesses us in abundance and transforms us.

The suffering and death of Jesus on the cross is one of the most open miracles of God's abundance. It is a sign of His presence with us. It is a sign of His abundance and love for us. When we cry out in despair, His hearing our cries is a sign of His abundance. In our suffering, God suffers along side us and this is a sign of His abundance and presence.

At the wedding the water is turned into wine. At the last supper, the wine is turned into blood. God is in the transformation at the table. In John Newton's hymn "Amazing Grace", we sing of that amazing transformation. "I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind but now I see." When mortal life shall cease, I shall possess within the veil, a life of joy and peace.

Gloria Gaither in her hymn "Something Beautiful" wrote, "All I had to offer Him was brokenness and strife, but He made something beautiful of my life" What is your favorite hymn? Is it about God's transformation of your life? Has He made something beautiful of your life? God can change despair into hope, God can change bitterness into peace, God can change hatred into love, God can change sorrow into joy, God can change sin into grace, and God can change death into life.

Tomorrow we celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday. In 1963 he gave his famous speech in Washington, DC. Martin Luther King understood and believed that God was in the transformation business. Near the end of his speech, Mahalia Jackson cried out, "Tell them about the dream Martin". Then Martin Luther King went from speaking to preaching for these are his words which have lived on:

**...I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.**

**...I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.**

**...I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight; and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together.**

**...when we allow freedom (to) ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:**

**Free at last! Free at last!**

**God Almighty, we are free at last!**

Our name is not "forsaken". Our name is not Methodist. Our name is "Delight of the Lord". We have been transformed. Do you believe you have been transformed by the power of God? If you believe that and it fills the very depths of your soul, if you do and are willing to declare it, then you can sing with me:

*Free at last! Free at last!*

*Thank God almighty, we are free at last!*

For a loving God has saved us with his abundance of love and forgiveness and transformed us. We have been transformed. I was lost but now am found, blind but now I see. He made something beautiful of my life. I am free at last, thank God almighty, I am free at last.