

*The Second Sunday of Ordinary Time*  
**January 17, 2010**  
**St. Mark Presbyterian Church of Boerne, Texas**  
**David M. Evans, Interim Pastor**  
**Cab, Merlot or Pinot Noir?**

Reading the gospel of John is very much like being in someone else's dream. You enter John's dream world where everything has a meaning, and our job it is discern the meaning. And since there is a little bit of amateur Freud in each of us, John becomes a fascinating gospel to read and interpret. As Frederick Buechner writes:

*Every gesture, every detail, suggests the presence of meaning beneath meaning...  
voices speaking words of elusive but inexhaustible significance.*  
(in **The Hungering Dark**, p. 90-91)

Listen for the Word of God as it is recorded in the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter of the gospel of John:

***John 2:1-11***

John begins his gospel...not as Matthew, Mark, and Luke do with a telling of the circumstances of Jesus' birth or his baptism. No...John's gospel opens with words that take us all the way back to the beginning of creation:

*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,  
and the Word was God. And the Word dwelt among us...full of grace and truth."*

Then, instead of telling us of Jesus' baptism, or a confrontation with demons in the wilderness, or a sermon in the synagogue in Nazareth, John tells us that *on the third day* Jesus went to a wedding in Cana of Galilee. A wedding! What a surprising way for the Savior of the world to begin his ministry.

As you read the story of Jesus and his mother and the disciples at the wedding...it slowly begins to dawn on you that there are layer upon layer of barely revealed clues for us to discern in this narrative.

- Why does Jesus go to the wedding on the *third* day?
- Why are there *six* stone water jars for the Jewish rite of purification?
- Why does Jesus speak to his mother in what some might interpret as a tone of *disrespect*?
- Why a *wedding* as the site of his first sign?
- What significance does the *wine* have for Jesus?

If you know anything about the life of Jesus you immediately begin to play with some of the connections:

1. That the miracle of water and wine occurred on the third day suggests another miracle that would happen on the third day as the women went to the tomb and found it empty.
2. The six jars of water might suggest the six days of creation in which God created the heavens and the earth.

3. The wine of the wedding banquet strongly reminds us of the wine of another banquet with these same disciples in an Upper Room.

Do you see how fascinating it is to pass the time psychoanalyzing the significance of the signs John provides for us in his dreamy gospel? Do you see the layer upon layer of meaning of which you have to be aware as you read even a simple story like the miracle at the wedding in Cana?

But what does it all mean? Why does John begin his story of Jesus' ministry with this miracle...a story none of the other gospels felt important enough to include in their accounts of the life of Jesus?

I could be wrong...as shocking a thought as that might be to some of you! I could be wrong...well, probably not!! Perhaps I am wrong, but it seems to me that John tells this story at the beginning because John wants us...his readers...to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is about *grace upon grace*. As John introduces us to Jesus he writes that he is "*the Word become flesh, dwelling among us full of grace and truth.*" And then John makes an astonishing claim. John writes: "*From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.*"

***Grace upon grace.*** The story of the miracle at Cana is to me the story of God's super-abundant grace for those who have eyes to see and ears to hear and lips to taste. Grace upon grace. The six stone jars that Jesus turned into wine each held between 20 and 30 gallons. The wine that Jesus provided for the poor, peasant guests at this simple wedding feast was an abundance of wine that these simple folk could only imagine. This was not just a little table wine. This was gallons of wine for each guest. And as if to make his point even clearer, John drives home the point that the wine Jesus provided was not the cheap stuff I buy found on the bottom shelf at HEB. This is not the bargain \$5.99 special. No, Jesus provides wine from those special "reserve" bottles, the ones costing \$40 or \$50, on display at the entrance to the wine section. This is the really, really good stuff, the wine that has rarely graced my lips. The kind you are invited to serve if you want to invite me to your home! And note that I have conveniently listed my wine preferences in the sermon title!

Grace upon grace. The story about the wedding at Cana is about the superabundance of God's grace. From the very beginning John wants us to be clear about the *kind* of Savior who has come among us. This is a Savior with enough grace for all...especially those who feel they do not deserve it!

This is about the superabundance of God's overflowing and amazing grace. I am convinced that John wants his readers to know up front that this is no ordinary Savior who has come to dwell among us. This is the Savior who brings grace upon grace. This is the God, as John will soon remind us, who so loved the world that this God gave this Son who turned water into wine...God gave this only child...not so the world might be condemned but so that the world might be saved.

This God...this Savior...this Jesus...he is the life of the party. Jesus turned water into wine...wine...the prophet Isaiah's symbol of gladness and feasting. Jesus' coming was not to condemn and destroy us...nor to condemn and destroy our enemies...but to bless and save both us and them. John understands Jesus so differently from our famous brother in Christ with the national TV audience who, yesterday, determined on his own that the devastating earthquake in Haiti was a direct result of their sinfulness, a "bargain with the devil" as he said for booting out the French and a history of voo-dooism. My question to you is: do you really want a theology that says "you get what you deserve?" When I look back on my own life, I hope to God I don't get what I deserve.

No, that is not the kind of God, that is not the kind of Savior, John introduces to us at the wedding at Cana. John introduces us to Jesus. Jesus, who came and lived among us full of grace upon grace. Jesus entered our daily lives so that he could weep at our funerals as he did when his friend Lazarus died...and so that he could rejoice at our weddings which is precisely what he did at Cana in Galilee.

In Dostoevsky's grand novel **The Brothers Karamazov** the brother Alyosha attends the wake for his beloved mentor Father Zosima. But his own weariness and the sound of Father Paisii reading the gospel in the darkened room soon puts Alyosha into a dreamy state. As Father Paisii reads the story of the wedding at Cana in Galilee Alyosha incorporates the story into his dream. *"It is a dream of indescribable joy."*

When Alyosha awakens he walks out of the room and into the yard of the monastery. *"His soul was overflowing with emotion and he felt as if he needed lots of room to move freely. Over his head was the vast vault of the sky, studded with shining, silent stars. The still-dim Milky Way was split in two from the zenith to the horizon. A cool, completely still night enfolded the earth."*

And then Alyosha does a curious thing. He falls to the earth and hugs the earth...kissing it again and again...drenching it with his tears...vowing to love it always. He is *"watering the earth with his tears of love and joy."*

Alyosha had encountered the God of grace upon grace. He was alive as he had never been before. Life. Grace. Not what he deserves, but incomparable joy! AMEN