



October 21, 2012
Pastor Mark Toone
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

*All Things New:
New Wine
John 2: 1-12*

When you go to presbytery meetings like we did two weeks ago, there can be some pretty long days. One night I was just wiped out. When I dragged myself back to my room, I pulled out my toothpaste, loaded up the brush and got started. I decided this would be one of those times when I gave my gums a good going over, so I was really brushing away. And then it struck me: "This toothpaste tastes funny... kind of minty, but not quite minty." The more I brushed, the weirder it tasted and the creamier it felt. The tube was lying face down so, while I kept brushing away, I flipped it over to check out the brand name of this odd-tasting toothpaste. Here is what I saw: *Anti-Itch Hydrocortisone Cream with Aloe*.

I nearly threw up in the sink. I had aloe anti-itch cream aftertaste all night. On the positive side, I haven't had itchy gums since! It's a bad thing when you discover that what you think cleans you up... in fact, doesn't. And that is exactly what we discover in this morning's text.

Like last week, there is so much to this passage I'd like us to journey through it verse by verse. This requires a little more work on your part. Are you with me? So, keep your Bibles open.

Read John 2:1-12

This story is mentioned only in John's gospel. Late in his life, John decides to write a different kind of gospel. Matthew, Mark and Luke are more biographical. John is theological. He selects seven miracles, five of which we find nowhere else in the Bible, and uses them to make his case for Jesus. So every time we read a miracle in John—the word for miracle is "signs"—we remember that he picked that sign, and left out a whole bunch of others, because he wants his readers to do something. What? Believe in Jesus! Remember? ^{20:31} "These things are written that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." Every one of John's "signs" points to something behind itself. So, when we read about Jesus changing water into wine, there is more to it than that! It points to something more. Our job is to try and figure that out, okay?

For instance, look at the first four words in this text: "On the third day..." Maybe that is just a temporal reference, but what else? When you hear "on the third day," what comes to mind? Easter... the resurrection of Jesus! Now we are a long way from that part of the story, but John starts right out with a previously untold miracle that hints at the bloody sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. By using Easter words, "on the third day," is he already pointing ahead to the most important moment in history?

"On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding."

Why were they there? They were invited. Who invited them? We don't know, but do you know who came from Cana? Nathanael. Remember him from last week? Maybe the cynic who converted in chapter 1 invited his new friend Jesus to his hometown for a big celebration. Because that's what weddings were in that day... a week of partying!

Let's pause here. Have you ever noticed how really serious Christians can be some of the stuffiest killjoys you have ever met? Somehow, over the centuries, we have come to equate being Christian with being a party pooper. If that's you, you are nothing like Jesus. John begins his account of Jesus' ministry at a party. It's the first of many, according to the gospels. In fact, it's one of the things about Jesus that ticked off the religious leaders: he hung out with "sinners". Tell me, how are we ever going to share the good news of Jesus with those who don't Him if we aren't willing to go to where the "sinners" are? And of course, when we show up, we will fit right in with a bunch of other sinners, won't we? For the record, who here isn't one?!

³*When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."*

⁴*"Dear woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied, "My time has not yet come."*

⁵*His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."*

The groom's family was responsible for providing all of the food and refreshments for the party. To run out of anything was a huge embarrassment. Mary notices and decides to bring this catastrophe to her son's attention. How does Jesus respond? The NIV sweetens it up a little bit but here's what the Greek says: *"Woman, what does this have to do with me?"* Tell me men, when your mom or wife asks you to take out the garbage, how many of you have ever replied, "Woman..." (Only once, I'll bet!) Actually, it's not as rude as it sounds. Jesus also calls Mary "woman" from the cross. But His response is a little testy.

Who knows, maybe this wasn't the first time Mary tried to get Jesus to show off. She was a Jewish mother, after all. Maybe there had been other times when Mary said, "My boy can take care of this problem. Jesus, go ahead... do your thing!"

How many times did He say, "Mom... not now! Not yet. It is not my time." Literally that phrase is, "My hour has not come." For Jesus, His "hour" was His crucifixion and resurrection. That was the moment when His identity would be revealed to all. Not now. Not yet. He was just getting started in His ministry and He wasn't going to be pushed into doing something He wasn't ready to do. Not even by mom.

And yet, notice Mary's response: *"Do whatever he tells you."* If Jesus had told you, "This is not my concern," what would you have done? Dropped it, right? But Mary was so certain that Jesus could fix this... she gave one of the greatest summaries of Christian discipleship you will ever find. "Do whatever he tells you." If you call yourself a Christian, your life should be summed up in these five words. "Do whatever he tells you." Where shall I serve? Whom shall I befriend? How shall I spend my time? How shall I spend my money? How shall I invest my life? Answer: *"Do whatever he tells you."* It's that simple. You might say, "I don't know what He's telling me to do." Fair enough. But there is plenty that He has told us here. If you just start by loving and living, and giving and forgiving the way He has already told us... you would be way down the road. What is Jesus telling you to do right now that you steadfastly ignore or disobey? What would momma say? *"Do whatever he tells you!"*

May I dwell here one more moment? There are times in our life when we are going to turn to God with a problem that seems serious to us. We are going to cry out to Him, beg Him to do this or that or the other thing. And it might appear as if God is saying, "Nope. I'm not gonna do that!" It might even feel like He is saying, "Why are you bothering me with this?" I have a friend who didn't get a job this week that he was sure he would get... and he needs. So, how does he—or any of us—respond to God's apparent indifference? Like Mary. She had such faith that Jesus could and would take care of it—even when the initial response seemed discouraging... even when it felt like a "No"—that she just came right back to him. She assumed her good son would do what was good and right. We can assume the same thing. Don't give up on God!

⁶Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, ⁹and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

¹¹This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

When you visit the village of Cana with me someday, there are two different churches that claim to be built on the site of this miracle. In each one you find ancient water jugs that date back to the first century. They are carved out of a single block of stone and hold 20-30 gallons of water each. They were common in Jewish communities because these were the jars that held water for ritual purifications. Before you ate or prayed or worshiped, you had to wash yourself in a certain way. It symbolized the cleansing of your sin which made it possible for you to approach God.

Jesus ordered the servants to fill all six jugs... to the brim, notice. Then, he told them to draw from the jug and take it to the butler. This is fascinating. The servants knew what was in there; they just filled them up. There was no hocus pocus; nothing was said of how Jesus does His miracle. These people simply obey, draw the liquid, and take it to the butler to taste. He was astounded. Normally, the best wine was served at the beginning of the feast and then later, when people were light-headed... the box wine was brought out. But this was the best wine he had ever tasted.

This [image] is a bottle of 1907 Heidsieck wine. It is the most expensive bottle of wine ever sold. It went for \$275,000! Can you imagine that Jesus produced anything but the best? That would be \$99,000,000 worth of wine sitting in those stone jars! The butler didn't even know what had happened, but the servants did. And His disciples did. And as a result of this modest miracle, the disciples who had been tagging along with Jesus had faith in Him. Believed in Him!

Let me ask this: why this miracle? Why, out of all the spectacular miracles that Jesus performed—including raising people from the dead—would John lead with this one? Water into wine? It's impressive. But most of the people didn't even know what had happened. It certainly wasn't intended to "wow" everyone. It was a private, modest little miracle, and kind of an odd one, don't you think? Why lead off with this?

Theologians differ on this. Here's what I think. Remember what the jars were intended for? Purification. Purification from sin! Purification before whom? God! Those jars represented the Jewish system of cleansing. If you want to come to God, you need to wash yourself up as best you can. It's like John's baptism. You admit you've screwed up, go into the water and get cleaned up. For now, until you screw up again, and then what? You wash again. It's why the jars were always around. It's why the jars always had water. Because the human capacity for sin and failure is limitless, and if washing with waters of purification is the only way to deal with it, you'd better have lots of it!

And notice this, how many jars were there? Six! In Hebrew, six is the number of incompleteness! Seven is the number of perfection. Six is imperfect. Was John telling us that the Jewish system of purification for sin was incomplete?

If this miracle is really a sign that points to something else, what is that deeper thing? Well, who is the one able to wash us clean from our sin; whose grace is embarrassingly, abundantly, overflowing? And whose cleaning job is once and for all? And think about this. At the end of Jesus' ministry, what will be the sign He gives His disciples to represent His blood poured out for the forgiveness of their sin? Wine, right? At the last supper!

But, there is no Last Supper in John's gospel. Why? Perhaps because right here—at the beginning of the gospel—he gives this “sign” of how Jesus has replaced the old, inadequate religious method of getting right with God. A method that was intended as a temporary fix until the permanent solution was offered. Jesus, the eternal, divine, creator God has taken on human flesh and pitched His tent in our backyard. And now we discover why He has come... to lavish us with His blood of infinite worth, to spill it out in such abundance that He will cover every sin that is brought beneath its flow.

That's why John starts here, with this sign. He starts at the end. He gives us a glimpse of the reason Jesus has come to earth. He gives us a glimpse of the “hour” of His glory when He will be crucified, killed and resurrected; and in that act of sacrifice, He will wash you clean... for good, for God, forever! Hallelujah!

I want to return to my toothpaste story. It's a bad thing when you discover that what you think is cleaning you up, isn't! Do you know what the favorite American method of dealing with guilt and shame is? Be better. Try harder. And even in this room—with this big crowd of Christians—there are a bunch of us who still don't get it! Cleaning up your own act doesn't work. It never has! It's like six stone jugs!

But there is one way that does clean up our sin and guilt. May I invite you to drink from the new and perfect wine of Jesus? Are you struggling with guilt that you cannot let go of? Jesus is ready, He is able and He is willing to forgive you once and for all. What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus. Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

Sermon Questions

- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.

- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.

- **DIG DEEPER**

1. Jesus' changing of water into wine is the first of seven miracle-signs in John's gospel. This modest, not too spectacular miracle appears in no other gospel, yet John leads off with this. Why, do you think?
2. What does Jesus' presence at this wedding say about his view of marriage? Parties? Fun? How does this fit with your view of a "proper" Jesus?
3. For John, the seven "signs" all point to something more or deeper? How does it point to the Last Supper? How does this sign point to the cross?
4. What does this sign point you toward in your own Christian discipleship? Why?