

Keeping the Good Wine until Now
2EpiphanyC

“Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” John 2:10

Couples today are staging some oddball weddings: At transfer stations, on suspension bridges, in front of convenience stores. But there was nothing strange about the wedding in Cana of Galilee ... at least until the wine ran out. Michelle — not her real name — is a Michigan woman who works at a 7-11. She loves her customers, her work and her fiancé.

So she married him on the asphalt outside the 7-11 on 7/11 — July 11th — carrying her bouquet in a Super Big Gulp cup. At the reception, hot dogs and Slurpees were served at reduced prices.

In Washington state, a wedding was celebrated 18 stories up atop the Tacoma Narrows Suspension Bridge soaring over Puget Sound and high above the speeding traffic whizzing by down below. The happy twosome walked what may be the longest aisle in wedding history.

In Maine, one couple first met at their town transfer station — locally known as The Dump. He had just started working there. She had just brought her first recyclables. They plan to be married where they met while standing in the bucket loader. Town folk have been donating returnable bottles to build a honeymoon fund. The couple is seeking ways to incorporate recycled objects into their wedding outfits. They can't wait to say “I do” at The Dump.

There was nothing strange about the wedding at Cana until the wine ran out. Middle Eastern families attach great importance to the milestones of life. Thus a wedding was not just a brief ceremony, but an experience shared by the entire community. The typical wedding feast could last up to seven days. A friend of ours from India living in Madison is expected to keep her wedding celebration going for 15 days!

That sounds strange to our modern way of thinking, but this offered a bright interlude in an otherwise dreary existence in ancient Palestine. The ceremony would begin on Tuesday at midnight. After

the wedding the father of the bride would take his daughter to every house so that everyone might congratulate her. It was a community experience. Weddings were a time of joy.

Years ago when Johnny Carson was the host of The Tonight Show he interviewed an eight year old boy. The young man was asked to appear because he had rescued two friends in a coalmine outside his hometown in West Virginia. As Johnny questioned the boy, it became apparent to him and the audience that the young man was a Christian. So Johnny asked him if he attended Sunday school. When the boy said he did Johnny inquired, "What are you learning in Sunday school?" "Last week," came his reply, "our lesson was about when Jesus went to a wedding and turned water into wine." The audience roared, but Johnny tried to keep a straight face. Then he said, "And what did you learn from that story?" The boy squirmed in his chair. It was apparent he hadn't thought about this. But then he lifted up his face and said, "If you're going to have a wedding, make sure you invite Jesus!"

The little boy was on to something. Weddings are time of Joy.

At the wedding, Jesus attended in Cana of Galilee, the invitation of friends, there was no intention to do any miracles. It was an ordinary occasion of joy. Then there was a shortage of wine. Not only was that a social embarrassment, it was also a symbol. For a wedding to run out of wine was an omen that there was little chance of this particular marriage reaching its full potential, maybe joy was not meant for this couple.

Like a good mother, used to coming to the rescue of others, Mary turns to Jesus to intervene. Jesus' reply is terse and unexpected. Mary was only trying to provide a remedy for this couple's future. Jesus has performed no miracles as of yet and is obviously not ready to expose himself to the world. Jesus concedes perhaps to please Mary. He feels no obligation to rescue this ill planned wedding. Was it his time to act?

A minister is driving down to New York to see a show, and he's stopped in Connecticut for speeding. The state trooper smells alcohol on his breath, and then he sees an empty wine bottle on the floor, and he says, "Sir, have you been drinking?"

And the minister says, "Just water."

The trooper says, "Then why do I smell wine?"

And the minister looks down at the bottle and says, "Good Lord, he's done it again!"

There was no excuse for the lack of wine given. Finally, what Jesus does do is a fitting wedding gift mixed with rich symbolism. He has six large jars filled with water holding some thirty gallons a piece, used we are told, for ceremonial washing. Jesus takes ordinary water and turns it into vintage wine. This like so many of his miracles the miracle at Cana reveals Jesus taking the old and exchanging it for the new, taking his human life and changing it into eternal life, taking ancient holy tradition and turning it into living, holy and human documents.

The chief steward's words in verse ten may fall on ears that just don't understand the nuances of dining etiquette. Was it common practice to save on expensive wine and slip in the cheap? It might be similar to buying a five dollar bottle of Boones Farm for communion wine hoping you could make it pass for Christian Brothers. Or was it more a matter of honor for the bridegroom when at a wedding he and not the bride was to go to no expense to celebrate?

Neither concern for a wedding or tradition seemed to matter to Jesus. What mattered is stated in verse 11 of the gospel: "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."

It was for faith, that Jesus saved day. It was for his disciples' belief in him that Jesus brought joy in common everyday life. It was to be his glory and destiny that Jesus takes empty jars of clay symbols of our own lives, and makes them into human vessels fit for his Holy Spirit. May God lead us deeper into his truth, into his will, into the mysteries of faith for his glory and honor. Amen

