

Dorothy Churn LaPenta  
Christ Our Anchor Presbyterian Church  
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John 2: 1-11

## JUST A GUEST AT A WEDDING

There's a painting at the Nelson Atkins Museum in Kansas City, Missouri entitled "The Marriage Feast At Cana" by the Italian artist, Sebastiano Ricci. It depicts the wedding guests in the foreground of the painting filling their chalices with wine from the stone jars. It's a very celebratory scene; lots of people, lots of color, music, singing, feasting. But at first, I couldn't find Jesus in the crowd.

My thought was, "Hey wait, don't these guests know that if it weren't for Jesus, there wouldn't be wine in those stone jars? The scene opens by telling us that the wine had given out, but these guests filling their chalices had no clue.

Then I spotted him... Jesus.... sitting inconspicuously among the people, engaged in conversation, celebrating a marriage, having a good time, but just another guest at a wedding.

And that's the way Jesus wanted it. This first miracle of Jesus as recorded by John is such a central scene in my mind, but maybe it was no big deal. I mean, of course, it was a very big deal, but by way of a mostly unnoticed miracle that changed the day and paved the way for the continuous celebration.

Let's think this about this scene for a moment. We are at a wedding. A wedding celebrates a new relationship with so many hopes for a shared future all amid a community of family and friends.

In Jesus day and time, it would have been a serious loss of face, a great embarrassment to the host had the wine run out.

So, there are these six stone jars used for the ritual of purification, and John gives a lot of detail about these stone jars. In the Jewish tradition, there is a ritual called "netilat yadayim" where people wash their hands one at a time and say a blessing before a meal. Now these jars held 20-30 gallons of water- that's 180 gallons of water at the most. That means a lot of people could wash their hands-this had to be a big party with lots of guests. This ritual of cleansing had apparently already happened because the jars were empty. So, Jesus takes the structures (these jars) of an old tradition and he's going to do something new with them.

He instructs the servants to fill the stone jars with water. When some was drawn out and taken to the chief steward, it wasn't water that he tasted, but wine, the good wine- the wine usually

served first. Now, there were 180 gallons of wine. The steward gave the bridegroom credit for running down to the wine store and replenishing the wine.

But the servants knew..... the disciples knew..... Jesus' mother knew..... and we know.  
It was Jesus who saw to it that the celebration would prevail.

There are several Old Testament references to an abundance of overflowing wine being associated with the day of the Lord. So, the writer of John's Gospel may be letting us in on things... on the miracle, on the abundance of wine and making the connection to Jesus' identity as Lord, very early in this Gospel.

But the reality is that Jesus' first miracle was subtle. Most of the people didn't even notice.

What else is God up to in the world that no one seems to notice?

We think of God as BIG!! God encompasses BIG!! But maybe redemption and transformation happen in small ways..... small, subtle that change things in big ways.

Why else would God come into the world by way of a newborn who had no headlines, no cloud descending, no confetti parade? I mean, who noticed? Some shepherds, Joseph, Mary.

We haven't spoken about Mary yet in the story of the wedding at Cana. Many when they read this story are very disappointed in Jesus' interaction with his mother... calling her "woman." That has a jarring connotation for us today that may not have been as irritating in Jesus' time. But we can imagine Jesus rolling his eyes at his mother as he says, "What concern is it of mine that the wine has run out?"

I agree that Jesus might benefit from a copy of "Miss Manners," and a reminder to "Honor your father and mother."

But I think what is missed is that for some reason and we don't know why, Mary had confidence in what her son would be able to do.

What gave her this confidence? Had she **noticed** that when Jesus was around things happened, life changing, transformative, redemptive, good things happened?

Sometimes we don't see the central moment of transformation, only the results. Sometimes we don't even put God's name to something that is life changing. I don't think serving God's ego and recognition is what matters to God. What matters to God is that God's children get their lives back when they are lost. What matters to God is the experience of hope, grace, peace, and joy. What matters to God is that there can be celebration.

The theologian Richard Rohr has said, "I have committed myself to joy. It must be announced and in some form taken to refugees, slum dwellers, saddened prisoners, angry prophets. Now

and then, we must even announce it to ourselves. In the prison of cynicism, contempt and scorn, someone must believe in joy.”

There’s a scene in the book “The Music Shop” by Rachel Joyce which is a story of redemption in a most surprising place.

Frank is the owner of The Music Shop. It is 1988 and the representatives from various companies want him to market CDs because they are the future of recordings. (Ha! Ha! That day has passed).

But Frank is only interested in selling vinyl records. Frank’s background is quite tumultuous. His shop is on one of the back streets in London, Unity Street, which is frequented by very few people now that big box stores have come on the scene. But somehow people find their way to this music shop. Some come to buy vinyl records. Mostly, those who walk through the door are people who would otherwise just be roaming the streets or weeping in their one room flats.

They come through the door and Frank engages them and they tell their life story. There seemed to be no sad stories that Frank could not shoulder.

The one treasure that Frank did have from his difficult upbringing is his knowledge and insight to music, all genres. He built listening booths in his shop from old wardrobe dressers so that people could sit with headphones and listen to Franks’ music recommendations for them. Frank might say, “Let me have you listen to some Aretha Franklin and see what you think.” Or, “I am going to put on some Vivaldi and what I want you to listen for is how he makes individual instruments the stars of the show. Suddenly, you realize you are listening to wind, and rain, a storm, but then you hear singing birds, and you find yourself in a day so hot you can hardly move. But you really must listen.”

One day, the Tattoo artist, Maud, who also owned a shop on Unity Street came into the music shop. “Here!” Frank said, “Sit in there and put on these headphones. There’s something I want you to hear.” “I am not sitting in that old stupid cupboard.” But she soon found herself sitting on a velvet chair in Frank’s homemade listening booth with a headset so large, it was like wearing a hatful of music. She shut the door and it was a very strange feeling because it reminded her of the days when she was a little girl, and she would hide among her mom’s dresses and Dad’s suits trying not to breathe so she wouldn’t be found.

“I think you will like this,” Frank said from the other side of the door. “Barber, ‘Adagio For Strings.”

“Who the heck was Barber?” thought Maud. The only thing she ever played was Def Leppard and his heavy metal and the louder the better. Anything that would silence those voices that played continuously in her head. *“Where is that child? Fetch the belt! Everything’s wrong with her. Why can’t she just be a good little girl?”*

The music started and it was like she had walked through a magic door. It was so sad and so simple that it could break your heart, but it didn't. From the softest of beginnings, it built and built as if the music were climbing a set of stairs and the violins screaming, "AHHHHHHH!" And then it stopped. Nothing! Her heart had swooped in her mouth. When the music started again, she was in tears. Like a switch had been flicked on and her eyes were spouts of running tears. Because those few moments told her that life goes on even when you think it can't. She knew that there is cruelty, bad things in this world for certain.

But she discovered THIS is there too and even more... this beauty, this hope, this message that the human adventure is worth it after all.

As Maud left the booth, the music stayed with her. The shop was just the same. Her past was just the same, but now there was also this. This! Whatever it was! (Redemption/  
Transformation.

Whatever it was, it was truth, by way of a small miracle.

"Was it okay?" asked Frank. How could she say? How do you tell someone that by being in a cupboard for eight minutes, your life has been changed?

Christ Our Anchor friends, the God who shows up in a teenager's womb, The God who shows up in a baby born in an inconspicuous place, the God who shows up as just another guest at a wedding is likely to show up anywhere. Don't put anything past God.

We all have our individual star words for this year, but maybe as a community our word could be "NOTICE!!" Notice where God is at work and walk into those places and be part of it.

After that wedding at Cana, Jesus went down to Capernaum and his disciples, and his mother followed him. Of course, they did!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen!

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