



## First United Methodist Church - Moweaqua, Illinois

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### About Miracles

### John 2: 1-11

Have you ever prayed for a miracle? I'm not talking about a really big miracle like praying for a family member near death. I'm talking about little miracles like, Oh, Lord, please let the traffic light stay green! Or Jesus, please help me win the Publishers Clearinghouse Contest! Or, God, please let our team win! Have you ever asked God to repeal the laws of gravity, undo the past, change weather patterns or suspend time just for your convenience? Is there anyone in the room who has ever prayed for that kind of miracle? I suspect we all have at sometime or another. So, we can appreciate our lesson from the Gospel.

In today's scripture Jesus is making his first public post-baptismal appearance at a wedding. A time that is usually an occasion for great joy and celebration. But there is a problem at this particular celebration. They are running out of wine. Now we have to keep in mind that this is not a typical Methodist celebration – iced tea had not been invented yet – so this was a terrible disaster. For the ancient Jewish people, wine represented life and abundance. It was an integral part of any celebration especially a wedding. No wine meant no party. And back then weddings used to go on for a week. For a host to run out of wine was a great embarrassment. Not only would the guests think that the host was being miserly but people in the ancient world believed that the wedding party was part of the bride's dowry and a failure to provide an adequate wedding reception could result in litigation. Therefore, the family of the bride would not only suffer embarrassment, but they also stood to face legal consequences.

What is interesting is that Jesus' mother Mary asks him to intervene. Then she turns to the servants and says, "Do whatever he tells you to do." I can't even imagine what she expected. It wasn't like he could whip out his cell phone and order a few cases of Chablis.. It was if she challenging Jesus to use his divine powers. Scripture is silent about the youthful years of Jesus. It doesn't tell us what kind of amazing abilities the young Messiah may have possessed. So Mary's request causes a person to wonder: had Jesus done this kind of thing before? What exactly did she think Jesus was going to do?

Jesus initially puts his mother off. It could be that he didn't want to use miracles unless it was absolutely necessary. Later in his ministry Jesus never took advantage of his miraculous powers to make life simpler or just to have a good time.. Jesus only used his miracles to help others or to advance the kingdom of God. He never preformed a miracle just because somebody told him too

My guess is that this is the problem with many of our requests to God: We want God to be a magician waving his wand and making everything right for us. When a young athlete comes off the

field and says, "God gave us the victory tonight," I always hope he is saying, "I thank God who gave me a good body so I can play at my best; I thank God for my good mind that allowed me to play alert and with awareness; I thank God for giving me the hunger to always be at my best." If that is what the young athlete is saying, then I want to say, "You are absolutely right. Thank God for all God's good gifts." But if that athlete is saying God literally guided the football through the uprights for the winning field goal so that one team would win and the other lose, that young man has a lot to learn about life and the nature of God.

God is God, not our servant. It is we who are to bring our actions into conformance with God's will, not God who is to bring the universe into conformance with our every whim. It is very human to assume that God wants our team to win. But when we compare that concern with the millions of suffering and dying people in this world, when we compare it with the victims of hurricanes, or volcanoes or floods, when we compare it to the stuff going on in Afghanistan or India, or Somalia , then even the most theologically unsophisticated of us must realize the absurdity of our request.

Having said that, however, we must acknowledge that miracles do occur. Initially Jesus resisted Mary's request, but when he finally did acquiesce to her wishes he did so in a big way. According to scripture, there were six stone jars in the home. They were there for the Jewish rites of purification. Each of the jars held anywhere from 20-30 gallons. Jesus told the servants to fill the jars with water, then he told them to draw some liquid out and take it to the wine steward. The wine steward was immediately impressed. He didn't know where this new wine came from, but it was better than the wine served first. This was highly unusual. After all it was customary and it made good sense to serve the best wine first when the guests were sober enough to tell the difference. After they had downed a few glasses they could care less about the quality of what they were drinking. Furthermore, we have to marvel at the amount of wine that Jesus made ...if you do your math you will discover that he made between 120- 180 gallons of wine!!! Which is really an absurd amount of wine. Why even if there were 100 people at that wedding (which was not very probable) that would amount to almost 2 gallons of wine per person! Which would be more than enough to keep a person snookered for a good long while.

And don't try to tell me that this was unfermented wine. Let's not produce another Methodist miracle here and change the wine into grape juice. We might be more comfortable with that but this was the real stuff, otherwise why would the wine steward make the comment about the quality of the wine and the drunkenness of the guests. Nope this was the real thing and it was ridiculously abundant and overflowing in generosity. Jesus had performed his first miracle. He turned water into real honest to goodness wine. Which tells us that when miracles do occur they are no small thing...no puny epiphany. There is no doubt that a miracle has taken place.

A long time ago, when we lived in Kentucky I used to know a guy who was nick named Duck Man. He was called by the name because he went duck hunting one time and forgot to take the ducks he

bagged out of the car. Those ducks must laid in the trunk of that car for a good month...finally the smell got so bad that Duck Man ...who was not the cleanest man you've ever met ...recognized that the odor was not connected to his personal hygiene.

Any way..Duck Man's real name was something like John Wesley Peterman. His father was a Methodist preacher but Duck had left the fold because he was turned off by the politics of the church. He was really down on religion and God . Anyway he used to tell a story about driving through the hills of Kentucky. Now these were real hills....steep, with no shoulders, the kind you have to gear down to climb. Anyway according to Duck Man they were driving along when a deer popped out of no where. He swerved to avoid hitting the buck and his car swirled around and ended up suspended over a deep ravine. Duck Man said that as the car was whirling around he saw angels. He said the angels went around to the front end of the car and caught it-preventing it from falling off the cliff into the ravine. He said it was the most astonishing thing. The front half of the car was just hanging in the air being held up by angels and the back half was suspended by the edge of the cliff. He was so shocked .he didn't know what to think and so he started to pray and pray hard And sure enough, just then a tow truck came along . The operator winched up the rear end of the car and they managed to bring the family and the car back to safety. Duck Man said after that he felt a lot closer to God.

Of course, some miracles aren't as flashy as Duck Man's that but they make an impact nonetheless. Tony Campolo tells about an experience that occurred when he was fourteen- years-old. Tony's family was very poor, and his father had Hodgkin's disease and was unable to work.. His hospitalization insurance was running out, and his mother did not know how she would keep food on the table.

Tony realized that he needed to lend a hand but at the same time he wanted to stay in school, maybe go to college one day. So he figured out that he could buy day old for a nickel a loaf and sell it for a quarter to restaurants throughout West Philadelphia. The transaction promised a hefty profit, but there were a couple of problems. He could not pick up the bread until after 9:00 p.m., and the only means he had for delivering the bread was by piling it on a wagon that he pulled behind his bike.

One dark, cold, rainy night at about a quarter till eleven Tony was making a delivery when suddenly there was a BANG! His front tire blew out. He pulled the bike off the street and sat down on the curb and he started to cry. He was soaked, shivering, and completely discouraged. He was all alone and finally in despair he cried out, "God, you're mean. Everybody else thinks you're kind. But I know you're mean. If you were kind you'd help me."

He cried for a few minutes more, then, for reasons that he will never figure out, he got up and pushed his bike and his load of bread to the service station down the street. The station was closed for the night. Nevertheless, he pushed his bike over to the air pump and tried to put air into the blown tire. Needless to say the air came out of the tire almost as quickly as he put it in. He didn't know what to expect, but trembling and crying, he just stayed there in the dark trying to put air in a blown tire.

Then the miracle happened! Suddenly he realized that the tire was hard. It was holding air. He stood up, confused and happy. He remembers yelling out loud, "Oh, thank you! Oh, thank you!" He made two more deliveries and then rode the bike three miles back to his house. And the tire held!

When he got home he lifted the bike onto his front porch and locked it. The time was just after 12:30 in the morning. He started walking to the front door when he heard a hissing sound. He turned back to the bike and watched with amazement as the air quickly left the blown-out tire. The miracle was over, and the tire went flat.

I told you these stories for a simple reason: My guess is that most people with a deep faith can look back over their lives and see a miracle (maybe not as spectacular as Duck Man's) but miracles still happen and when they do they usually transform us. They change the way we relate to God as we begin to realize that God loves us and that God responds to the difficulties in our lives.

So why did Jesus change the water into wine? The secret of the miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee may be found in two verses. The first clue is found at the beginning of verse one. The words translated "the next day" are more literally translated to read "On the third Day". This is a significant clue. Because if you know Biblical history than you will recognize that groups of 3 days are important. For example, Jesus was raised from the dead on the Third day which changed salvation history. Just as the true nature of Jesus was revealed by his being raised from the dead after three days... it makes sense that on the third day of his ministry the divine nature of Jesus was revealed at the Wedding of Cana.

The second clue is found in the eleventh verse: "This was the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana of Galilee, and manifested his glory; AND HIS DISCIPLES BELIEVED IN HIM." Jesus didn't perform this miracle to spare the bride's family embarrassment or even to please his mother. Jesus used this miracle to build the faith of his disciples. If you think about it, in some ways, the miracle symbolized what Jesus was about to do in the life of his disciples. He took ordinary human beings.... clay jars...who were filled with ordinary stuff... and through this miracle he showed them that they could become something more powerful than human flesh. And the same can happen for us if we allow ourselves to be filled with the Spirit of God. Just as water was changed into wine by Jesus, so ordinary fisherman and accountants and computer operators and teachers can be transformed into powerful witnesses for Jesus Christ.

Miracles happen, but they don't happen just to please us. So, if you're praying for your team to win and they don't, or if it rains on your daughter's wedding day, in spite of all the time you have spent on your knees, remember miracles are not about making you happy as they are about revealing God within our lives. And when they occur...just like that water ....you will be the person changed. ...to the glory of God... Amen

