

Sermon Notes: January 19, 2025

Focus: First miracle in John, Jesus turns water into wine. [Lectionary Readings](#)

The wedding in Cana is very a popular story from John. Stupid jokes about being surprised by wine abound today. I won't tell you on Sunday morning the well-worn joke of a person getting pulled over by the police. Once stopped, the officer asks if the driver has been drinking. The driver says I've only be drinking water, but the cop smells wine. In response, the driver says "Dang, Jesus did it again."



Why save the bar?

I think dumb jokes aside, the story makes a lot of sense, if we know the context. Wine is a symbol of a good earth being fruitful, and this fruitfulness is an expression of God's presence and sustenance both materially and spiritually. Jesus "making" wine promises renewal and connection. This reality is everywhere in the Bible and points to the future when God will "marry" creation.

Abundance and Prophecy

Brian Peterson, Professor of New Testament writes about the religious significance of wine on workingpreacher.org:

Wine in abundance is part of how that promised day of celebration is imagined (Joel 3:18; Isaiah 25:6). Second Baruch 29 (probably written, like John, near the end of the first century) promises that: "5 The earth will also yield fruits ten thousand fold. And on one vine will be one thousand branches, and one branch will produce one thousand clusters, and one cluster will produce one thousand grapes, and one grape will produce a cor of wine...8 And it will happen at that time that the treasury of manna will come down again from on high, and they will eat of it in those years because these are they who will have arrived at the consummation of time."

Food is religious. Abundance is an answer to prayer. Material elements pointing to spiritual truths are everywhere. Our modern, more sanitized view of religion is at odds with all of the Old and New Testament.

End of the Age, Marriage of Heaven and Earth

The wedding in Cana did happen AND it points forward to the promised "marriage supper of the Lamb." This Jesus the Lamb marriage is vividly described in Revelation. In Revelation, God is wiping away tears and making a feast for those who seek God. God wants us be part of this grand marriage. In the Cana story, Jesus is a bearer the promise that heaven and earth, he and his people, God and creation will all be reunited in a party that goes on forever. I hope the new heaven and new earth will have real wine, not just harps. I hope there will be real meals and singing, not just ethereal saints floating around in the clouds for 40 billion years.

Today I have been wondering how to apply the wedding story to our own lives. I would like to do three things. First, I want share a story in US history where the

party crashed out and the wine ran dry (Jimmy Carter's presidency from 1976-1980.) Secondly, I want to explore how Carter found, metaphorically, a way to experience wine from water and still be part of the party. Lastly, I want to charge each of us to keep starting over, keep trying new things, and keep expecting our current "watery" situation to find abundance with new "wineful" possibilities.

Jimmy Carter As a child, I only tangentially knew about Jimmy Carter. At first, my people all made good natured jokes about the religious peanut farmer who made it to the presidency. I knew people who drank "Billy Beer" made by Carter's brother. As the gas shortage of 1973 repeated in 1979, the good vibes disappeared. All I remember is sitting forever in the backseat of my mom's Honda Civic, with my wiener dog, wondering when it would be our turn to fill up the tank.



Carter's first years were so so, but by 1979 it got really bad. Farmers drove their tractors into Washington DC in protest of economic policies and armed Iranian college students overran the US Embassy and held 53 US Diplomats hostage into early 1981.

With the good vibes completely gone, everyone was rabid to dunk on Carter for anything. My family would not stop mocking him for the "killer rabbit" debacle when he slapped a "dangerous" swamp bunny away on his vacation.

By the election of 1980, Carter was crushed electorally by Ronald Reagan. Reagan won 489 electoral votes to Carter's 48. The "good news" for Carter is that it wasn't the worst defeat in history. There were other interesting drubbings like Lyndon Johnson vs. Barry Goldwater (1964) *486 electoral votes to Goldwater's 52*. The top winner was: Franklin D. Roosevelt vs. Alf Landon (1936) *523 electoral votes to Landon's eight -97% victory*.

Why am I telling you all this? Carter's enduring legacy will be in his peacemaking and homebuilding *after* he left office. After the "wine" ran out on his presidency, he went home in the south and grieved for a while. After some soul searching, he concluded there was an afterparty. Many of you watched his funeral at the Washington National Cathedral. He is fondly remembered and beloved for his peacemaking work (He won the Nobel Peace Prize 2002). His work with Habitat for Humanity continued well into his last years on earth.

I think there is a parallel to Cana and Carter. The wine ran out on a wedding and a presidency. So the Spirit intervened to keep the promise of a new heaven and earth alive in both.

Finally, what do this have to do with us? I want you to find peace and courage to engage your own life -wherever you find yourself. This quote has been sustaining for me. **"You're never too old, never too bad, never too late and never too sick to start from the scratch once again.**

Can we take the promise seriously that God is making all things new and the party keeps on rocking? **Todd**