

But why is Jesus hesitant? Perhaps because he knows the miracle road is a one-way street to the crossroad called Calvary. Jesus probably knew that this first miracle would trigger the countdown clock to the crucifixion. And that's part of what makes this first miracle so remarkable: it is the byproduct of Jesus trusting someone else's instincts. Mary had a sixth sense that this was his moment, and that is one key to cracking the miracle code.

Nine times out of ten we miss the miracle that is right at our fingertips simply because we're too close to the situation. We need someone to put a spotlight on something that is in our blind spot. Or put a pointy elbow in our ribs! Most miracles take a nudge. We have to be elbowed out of our assumptions, out of our complacency, out of our fears, or out of our failures. And it helps to have a relationship of trust with the one doing the nudging.

Sometimes it's harder to believe God for a miracle for *ourselves* than it is to believe God for a miracle for *others*. So we need to borrow faith from someone else's bank. I'm certain Jesus believed in himself and his abilities, but it was a mother's nudge that was the catalyst for this miracle.

The first key to experiencing the miraculous is discerning those little nudges. Hebrews 10:24 tells us: *Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds*. A spur is an apparatus used to nudge. Sometimes it's a pat on the back. Sometimes it's a kick in the rear. But either way, there is someone in your life who needs a nudge! Christian Discipleship, following Jesus, experiencing miracle – they start with obeying the nudges of the Holy Spirit.

I'm sure this wedding was the social event of the season. I know it was talked about for years afterward. What I love most about this first miracle of Jesus is that it's not about saving a life. It's about saving face! And it reveals how much God cares about the minute details of our lives. God is great not just because nothing is too big. God is great because nothing is too small. If it's a big deal to you, it's a big deal to God.

Running out of wine at a wedding may not sound like a big deal to you, but in Jesus' day it was the worst kind of humiliation possible. In a culture that valued hospitality above almost everything else, the lack of wine reflected poorly on the party planners and brought shame to the bride's family. It would have meant ruin for the couple even before they had a chance to start their new life together.

I'd love to have seen the smile on the bridegroom's face when Jesus turned the water into wine. Jesus didn't just help him save face: Jesus helped him put his best foot forward. Jesus didn't just save the day: Jesus made the day. And that's what Jesus does best: Jesus can turn the worst days into the best days, and he always saves the best for last.

Jesus saved the day by turning water into wine. Water. Two parts hydrogen. One part oxygen. It's the most basic chemical compound on earth. It's also the most vital. It covers 71% of the planet. It composes 65% of your body. But I wonder: when was the last time you thanked God for good old-fashioned water? For me, it was the day I visited the Dead Sea in Israel. It was a balmy 107-degrees Fahrenheit that day and we'd already spent several hours at the Qumran Caves where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. I was hot. I was tired. I had sand in places where sand should not be. I was getting cranky. Blessedly, the bathing site at the Dead Sea had a snack bar, and that bottle of water was the best thing I'd ever tasted! I savored every sip as I felt my spirit and my body revive. For the first time in my life I saw water for what it really is – a miracle.

We don't appreciate the miracles God consistently does day in and day out because God is too good at what God does! We take things for granted. What God does best, like keep our planet in orbit and provide water for life, we appreciate least. But if we learned to recognize the moment-by-moment miracles that are all around us all the time, we'd live in wonderment every second of every day. We'd also learn the secret to life: joy is not getting what you want, it's fully appreciating what you already have. Joy starts with appreciating the basics, like water.

The couple who got married at Cana walk off the stage and right out of Scripture, but the third day of their wedding feast was undoubtedly the defining moment of their lives. Every time they reminisced about their wedding reception or sipped a glass of wine, it didn't just jog their memory, it jogged their faith. That's what miracles do. When God does a miracle, our faith is bolstered, our belief is strengthened, and our hope is renewed. When God does a miracle, it nudges us to act and we nudge others to do the same!

The first miracle of Jesus foreshadows his last. At the wedding in Cana, Jesus turned water into wine. At the Last Supper, Jesus raised the cup of wine and said: *This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins* (Matt. 26:28). On the eve of the crucifixion, Jesus turned an ordinary cup of wine into a bottomless glass of grace. Jesus

transformed the fruit of the vine into the agent of forgiveness for every sin ever committed, from Adam to the apocalypse.

Without the shedding of blood, there was no remission of sins in the ancient Jewish sacrificial system. But to reverse the curse once and for all required a sinless sacrifice. So *God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in [Jesus] we might become the righteousness of God* (2 Cor. 5:21). It's the ultimate transformation. God's grace is the solvent that bleaches the crimson stain of sin and washes it white as snow. That's a life-changing miracle, but we fail to take it in and truly believe it.

I once visited a winery in Williamsburg, Virginia. One of my memories is of the pseudo-sommeliers swishing the wine in their glasses and taking the tiniest of sips. That's how too many of us sample the grace of God. We drink as though God's supply of grace is smaller than the communion cups we use to celebrate it. But you'll never get drunk with God's love that way. You've got to drink God's grace to the dregs.

As we gather around the Communion Table today, may we drink deeply of the grace that God offers us in Jesus Christ. May we begin to see the miracles all around us. May we feel the Spirit nudging us to do greater things in Christ's name. May this be the day that defines us as true disciples of Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, we need a miracle today. Like Jesus changing water into wine at the wedding feast in Cana, we need a miracle today. We are tired, Lord, of the hurts of this world. We are discouraged in the face of injustice, war, poverty, and indifference. We need a miracle today, Lord. Your steadfast love, like a mighty mountain, will not be moved. Your gifts, as many as the mighty winds, cannot be counted. Your glory, like a mighty torch, will not be put out. Lord, crown us with your love. Show us your glory, that in you we may be moved to acts of kindness, love, justice, and mercy. Lord, we need a miracle today. Amen.

[Heavily excerpted from Mark Batterson's *The Grave Robber*, Baker Books: Grand Rapids, MI, 2014.]

The Wine Maker

Sunday, February 7, 2016

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

John 2:1-11

There are days. Good days. Bad days. Long days. Tough days. Joyful days. Then there are days that define the rest of your life. This was that day for Jesus. For nearly thirty years Jesus worked in his father's carpentry shop. For as long as he could remember, people called him a carpenter. But on the third day of a week-long wedding feast, this cabinetmaker became the Wine Maker. The wine running dry at Cana was no accident. It was a divine appointment. Like most miraculous opportunities it came disguised as a problem. But Mary saw this day for what it really was: Jesus' date with destiny.

Scripture doesn't tell us how or when Jesus recognized that he had the power to do miracles, but I'm sure it wasn't at a wedding feast in Cana. I don't want to read anything in to Scripture that isn't there, but I wouldn't be surprised if Jesus practiced a few of his miracles before they became his profession. He may have amazed a few childhood friends while no one was watching, or carved a few pieces of wood with nothing but his mind, or turned water into any number of substances before he turned it into wine.

I believe that Jesus knew from an early age the power he had at his fingertips. So did Mary. Imagine trying to keep that power secret for thirty years? It must have been difficult to restrain his power when skeptics scoffed or bullies bullied. Yet Jesus held his hand. And that may be the greatest miracle of all: his power to perform miracles is awe-inspiring, but the willpower to *not* do what he was capable of doing is even more impressive.

But here, at Cana, Jesus performs a very public miracle. When the wine ran out, Mary made a beeline for Jesus. Then Jesus made a beeline right to the water jars. Jesus went back to basics. When Jesus turned water into wine, he turned a wedding party into his coming out party. The bride and groom became extras as Jesus took center stage. But it was a supporting actress who played the key role in this fateful scene. If you read between the lines in John 2, it seems like Mary is pushing her son and Jesus is resisting his mother. She wants him to take claim the limelight, but Jesus is waiting for his Father's cue.