



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

LifeGroup Study

August 11, 2024

John 2:1-11; Psalm 127

Community

OVERVIEW

In John’s Gospel, we encounter the God story, the broad stroke narrative of God’s plan for us and the world. John’s Gospel calls us to the journey of faith, believing the story of God that becomes our own story. Throughout John, Jesus demonstrates that he is the long-awaited Messiah, has encountered every human need in his own life, and can meet every human need in the life of the believer. Whatever we may encounter, Jesus is the application; or, to use today’s term, the app.

TODAY’S THEME

Throwing a party can make the host very anxious if everything doesn’t go just right. The wedding in Cana becomes the setting for great social anxiety when the wine runs out. Jesus is able to intervene and, in doing so, reveals himself ... and his disciples believe in him.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

On the surface, the anxiety present in this story is the social shame attached to running out of wine. On a much deeper level, this story points to the anxiety many experience of not being clean before God. Can God, will God, really forgive what I’ve done? We want our worshippers to know that “if we confess our sins, God who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

We want to confess our sin before God and one another, and pray that God would grant us the faith to believe that God’s promise of forgiveness is true.

INTRODUCTION: WEDDINGS AROUND THE WORLD

Depending on which part of Africa you are in, wedding ceremonies can be extremely elaborate, some lasting many days. Often, huge ceremonies are held during which many couples are united at the same time.

In Sudan and in other areas along the Nile, a man must pay his wife’s family in sheep or cattle for the loss of their daughter’s labor in support of the family. A wife may cost a man as many as 30 to 40 head of cattle. Often it is difficult for a man to pay the family and still have enough cattle left to support his new wife.

In Japan, purple is the color of love, and a young bride may choose to wear an elaborately-embroidered silk kimono covered in purple irises. Weddings are traditionally either Shinto, during which the natural spirits, the kami, are called upon to bless the couple, or Buddhist, with two strings of beads interwoven during the ceremony, symbolizing the joining of two families into one.

In Finland, it is tradition for the bride-to-be to walk from house to house with a pillowcase to collect her wedding presents. While she walks from house to house, an older, married man walks beside her, holding an umbrella or parasol over her head as a symbol of protection and shelter.

It is also traditional for a bride in Finland to wear a golden crown. During the wedding reception, she is blindfolded and spun around while all the unmarried girls dance around her. The one she places the crown on will be the next to marry!

Today, we will look at another wedding in the Gospel of John: the wedding in Cana.

ICEBREAKER

What’s the best wedding you’ve ever attended? What made it great? Which wedding practices do you love? Why? Which practices don’t you like? Why?

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, you pour out love and mercy in overwhelming abundance. You are able to forgive us, even though we feel we are not worthy. When we confess our sin, we are connected to the living reality that you, by grace, forgive us. We want to be clean before you, but we live with our own guilt and shame. We need you to reassure us and give us your peace. We want to dare to believe that, no matter how great our sin, your grace is greater. Amen.

Content

The purpose of John’s Gospel is to reveal Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. Chapters 1-12 are often referred to as “the Book of Signs.” Rather than calling Jesus’ acts “miracles,” which focuses on power, John calls them “signs,” pointing to their revelatory power (John 2:11). Most of these signs are put in the context of important events, festivals and institutions within Judaism. This allows John to demonstrate that God is doing something radically new, as well as revealing the personhood of Jesus. John does this on both a literal and symbolic level. (*Read John 2:1-11.*)

The story of Cana is far more than a story about a wedding and some wine. It is a story that carries remarkable symbolism for Jews and the Messiah. This story also says something important about the world into which this Messiah comes. “They have no wine” is not simply a comment from Mary about wedding hospitality. It is a theological statement about the Judaism that is now meeting its Messiah in this first miracle. It is about messianic replacement abundance, recalling Jesus’ synoptic sayings about new wine and old wineskins.

DISCUSSION Is there a modern equivalent to the dishonoring crisis of running out of wine at the wedding in Cana?

John tells us that this event takes place “on the third day.” The question, however, is “on the third day from what?” Because no referent is given, John probably intends this symbolically. This event begins the revelation of who Jesus is, and that revelation will be complete with the empty tomb.

DISCUSSION What are some other “third day” events in scripture? Why do you think the number three is so important in Biblical texts?

Weddings were, in many respects, the chief celebration of Jewish culture, providing imagery for messianic celebration and joy (parables of wedding celebrations, the marriage feast of heaven and earth). In Jesus, the messianic banquet has begun! Weddings were also socially loaded in ways that we can barely imagine. Running out of wine was more than an inconvenience. It was a dishonoring crisis for the host and would deeply shame the newly-married couple.

DISCUSSION Why did marriage feasts become so central to Jewish life? Are today’s weddings as socially loaded as this? Why?

While the interaction between Mary and Jesus seems strange, even harsh, in English, it carries no such connotations in the original Greek. Jesus’ response to Mary is, however, both important and revealing. “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?” implies both that Jesus’ concerns are deeper than surface realities, and that it is God’s agenda, not Mary’s, that drives Jesus. Jesus’ response, “my hour has not yet come,” points John’s readers to Jesus’ ultimate agenda: the cross. Throughout John’s Gospel, the word “hour” refers to Jesus’ passion. His death on the cross will provide far more than wine, and his provision will be for a far greater audience than these wedding guests.

DISCUSSION How is this marriage feast at Cana a microcosm of Jesus’ entire ministry and life? What does this story tell us about God’s agenda?

The six stone jars are critical to the meaning of this story. Clay jars could become ritually contaminated and had to be destroyed (Leviticus 11:33), but stone jars, according to rabbinic law, could not. These six stone jars, each holding between 20 and 30 gallons of water, were used for the ritual purification of the wedding guests. By changing the water into wine – 120 to 180 *gallons* of good wine – Jesus reveals two things about himself and his mission.

First, he reveals that the old system of getting clean with God is passing away and is being replaced by the sheer joy of God’s grace through the cross. Some have even suggested the number six is symbolic: one short of the perfect seven, pointing to the inadequacy of the law.

Second, Jesus reveals the abundance of this grace and forgiveness. This grace is for all sin, for all people, for all time. These themes are reinforced by the steward’s comment, which is theologically loaded on the symbolic level: “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.”

DISCUSSION What does the sheer amount of great wine tell us about the character of God? How does this all point to the inadequacy of the law?

The result of this first sign is twofold. First, Jesus reveals his glory. This first sign is a partial unveiling of Jesus’ identity as the Messiah and Son of God. Second, we’re told that Jesus’ disciples believe in him. While we may frontload this statement with all kinds of assumptions (for example, they believe that he is the Messiah), John leaves the meaning open. Based on the rest of John’s Gospel, it’s clear that the disciples do not yet fully comprehend Jesus’ identity, but this first sign certainly opens their eyes to the reality that Jesus is far more than your average rabbi! At this and every sign, the theme of John’s prologue is unfolding:

“He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.”

GOING DEEPER: DEEPER ANXIETY

What makes you anxious? Are there some things that God just can’t or won’t forgive? Do you find it harder to forgive others, or forgive yourself? Why? If God has already forgiven our sin through his death and resurrection, why do we still need to confess our sins? What does confession look like in your life as a disciple: how, when, how often?

Application

This week, let’s make it a daily practice to confess our sin before God and pray that God would grant us the faith to believe that God’s promise of forgiveness is true.

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, we often feel unlovable and unforgivable. We have said and done things that make us wonder if you could ever forgive us and love us. Meet us in our anxiety, and give us your peace. Be present in our restlessness and be our calm, safe place. Through the power and presence of your Holy Spirit, give us faith to believe that your abundance is greater than our deepest need. Amen.

John 2:1-11 NLT The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, (2) and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. (3) The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus' mother told him, "They have no more wine." (4) "Dear woman, that's not our problem," Jesus replied. "My time has not yet come." (5) But his mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." (6) Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. (7) Jesus told the servants, "Fill the jars with water." When the jars had been filled, (8) he said, "Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies." So the servants followed his instructions. (9) When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. (10) "A host always serves the best wine first," he said. "Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!" (11) This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.



Daily Walk on the Rock

August 11, 2024 John 2:1-11; Psalm 127

Monday

JOHN 4:1-42

Many Jews avoided passing through Samaria because they considered it inhabited by people of spiritual and ethnic impurity. Jesus not only passes through Samaria, but stops to talk to a woman with a very questionable reputation. Jesus asks her for something to drink (1-26). How does Jesus explain Living Water, and how does the woman respond (10-14; see also Psalm 42, Isaiah 55:1 and Jeremiah 2:13)? Jesus tells us he brings Living Water that can forever quench a person's thirst for God. The woman believes if she receives this water she will never have to return to the well again (15). That would make her life easier! But she appears to miss the real message: Christ does not come to make our lives easier, but to change us from the inside out, and to empower us to deal with our lives from a God perspective. Have you come for the Living Water to make your life easier, or to walk with the risen Savior as your strength and hope?

Tuesday

JOHN 4:43-54

Jesus has returned home again. Why the contrast between the crowd's welcome (45) and the comments from Jesus (44 and 48)? The royal official has traveled a long way to get to Jesus. How would you have responded to Jesus' instructions (50)? The official not only believes that Jesus can heal his son, but he obeys Jesus and returns home. Do you believe Jesus can work miracles, and obey, even if distance or outcome make it seem impossible? Do you believe that nothing can separate you from the love and care of Jesus? Read Romans 8:38-39. Spend time in prayer.

Wednesday

JOHN 5:1-18

Not even the fact that it is the Sabbath gets in the way of Jesus reaching out and healing the broken people around him. What does Jesus mean by his question in verse 6? What does the invalid hope Jesus will do? How do you think he feels about being healed instantly (8-9) and being challenged by the Jews (10-12)? Think about a situation you're in that seems hopeless. This scripture reminds us that God can and does minister to us in all kinds of situations. Sometimes that means healing, and sometimes that means helping us have meaningful lives by triumphing over our hardships and tribulations. Jesus tells the man to stop sinning so that nothing worse will happen to him (14). What does this tell you about the importance of spiritual healing? What kind of healing are you seeking? Lift it up to God in prayer.

Thursday

JOHN 5:19-47

Read Jesus' description of the Father. Jesus lives as God wants him to live because of his unity with God. If we identify with Jesus, we must honor him and live as he wants us to live. Does your unity with Jesus affect your lifestyle and your priorities? Why or why not? What happens to those who hear and believe? To those who do not (24-30)? Has the love of God filled your heart? Think about how scripture helps to grow the love of God in you. In verse 33, John testifies to the truth. Can that also be said of you?

Friday

JOHN 6:1-21

Why does the crowd seek to follow Jesus (2)? Jesus asks Philip where they will get enough food to feed the people. How would you have reacted (5-7)? Does Jesus ask for an impossible solution so he can set the stage for the powerful and miraculous act that he is about to perform? When has God stretched your limited resources (physical, emotional, financial) far beyond what you ever imagined? In what way do you need to trust the Savior right now? Don't let your estimate of what can't be done get in the way of letting the Savior work his miracles.

Saturday

JOHN 6:22-59

The people are still looking for Jesus and, when they find him, Jesus' answers to their questions show the difference between their interests and his. What is that difference? How are the people to work for the food that leads to eternal life (29)? The people ask for another miracle so that they may believe. Jesus explains that whoever comes to him will never be hungry, and whoever believes in him will never be thirsty (35; see also Exodus 16). Study Jesus' proclamation in 35-40. What is the main reason you follow Jesus? What is your daily spiritual diet: junk food, baby food, frozen food, or meat and potatoes? How do you hunger and thirst for Jesus? Spend some time in prayer with the Bread of Life.

Sunday

PSALM 144

This psalm has us rejoicing in God's care. Whether we are in the midst of plenty or in the midst of adversity, God is the One who watches over us and provides everything necessary for us to live a life that is worthwhile and has great purpose and meaning. Read this psalm slowly, and make it your prayer for this day.