

Questions God Asks What to you and to me?  
John 2:1-11, March 15, 2015, Maggie mish on UMCOR  
Boone United Methodist; Jason Byassee

Think with me of what those who reject faith think of church. You shouldn't have to think hard—we all have friends and loved ones who aren't here for a reason. Church is boring. You stand and sit and sing and listen and none of it makes sense. I myself remember as a kid when I was dragged to church twice a year looking to see how long the hymn was and it was always like 7-8 verses. Ugh! Or faith is a list of rules written by someone grumpy to ruin fun. Thou shalt not. Or worse faith is an exclusive thing that causes minorities to be excluded or even harmed. I was just in British Columbia, the west coast of Canada where 3% of people go to church on a Sunday. They'd say, in their most polite Canadian way, that they're the future. So what do we say Christians when others say faith is boring, self-righteous, or even harmful?

Here's what Jesus says life with him is like. It's a wedding. And when the wine runs out Jesus replenishes it. And not just with any wine, but the best wine. And nobody even knows about it except his disciples. He moves on quietly and a wedding was kept going and nobody even knows to thank him. Pretty different view of faith eh Canadians? Eh church?

This is part of a series of sermons on<sup>1</sup> Questions God Asks. The question for today is in verse 4 of the text I'm about to read to you. Mary asks Jesus for help with the wine problem and Jesus sasses his mom. Freaks out. Acts the surly teenager. Usually in English this is softened to something like "what concern is that of ours?" Or dearest mother, why should we concern ourselves with that? It's actually the question Jesus asks the demons in other gospels. "What to you and to me woman?" would be a literal translation,<sup>2</sup> a better English would be "what do you have against me woman?" Then Mary tells the wedding host something so important I can't describe it to you. It's a command that thunders through the ages. If we were filming the movie the actor would break the fourth wall look right in the camera and say this to make sure we don't miss it. "Do whatever he tells you," she says. That's it, the whole point of this sermon and the whole point of being alive. Do whatever Jesus tells you. Hear this word. And as we listen please stand and face the word and prepare to do whatever Jesus says. Let's stand and sing.

*On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 9 When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, "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." 11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*

That's the word of God, it belongs to you the people of God, **thanks be to God.**

<sup>3</sup>Point one today is about Mary, mother of God. There's a joke I like to tell that usually folks with some knowledge of the Catholic Church get first. But even the rest of us generally come along. It's from the gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> Questions God Asks logo up plz

<sup>2</sup> Woman, what do you have against me?

<sup>3</sup> I. The Mother

<sup>4</sup>There's a crowd of people who have caught a woman in adultery and are ready to stone her. But just for fun they decide to ask Jesus what to do first. He bends down and writes in the sand. What's he write? Some say he writes the sins of each one of them. Jesus knows stuff, terrifying stuff, about each of our hearts. I met a woman once who met Billy Graham, and she found herself confessing her sins to him at a party. "You'd be surprised at some of the things I've done," she said, and Graham looked back at her with kindness from those fierce blue eyes, "Ma'am, I am very seldom surprised." She said she found herself saying, "Oh God." See, he's an evangelist, he coaxed a confession of sin and belief from her. So the mob takes the woman to Jesus and asks if they shouldn't stone her like Moses' law commands. And he stoops to write. Some say he wrote down the question, "Where is the man?" Just so happens we penalize the woman but let the man wander off scot free, but it takes two to adulterize. So Jesus famously says "Let the one without sin throw the first stone." They leave, the eldest first—they know best they're not innocent. And none is left. Here comes the joke. In the joke a rock comes flying in from a distance. And Jesus says "mom!" Catholics first—Catholics talk a lot about Mary, we Protestants not a lot. And its important in Catholic teaching that Mary was without sin, to birth a child, Christ, without sin.

This is one of two places in the gospel of John where Mary is mentioned.<sup>5</sup> The other is at the foot of the cross, where Jesus makes provision for a new family for Mary. He tells his disciple John, look, this is your new mother. He tells his mother, look, there is your Son. In his dying moments Jesus births a new family, us, the church, Mary as our mother, John as our brother, all of us siblings. Here Mary is mentioned too only she's not mentioned by name. John just calls her "his mother." And what are mothers for? To be sassed. Anyone here not had a spat with your mother? Moms, any of y'all not been annoyed with your children? God has a mom. And he fought with her. Mary had a *divine* Son—and still couldn't get him to mind his manners. In Jesus, God becomes part of our worst family troubles to pour healing all over them and make them well. The Honeycutters, terrific band playing at Merlefest, sing this beautiful line, "It's the worn out places where the light shines through." Precisely in our place of deepest hurt God pours ointment all the way down that soothes, heals, makes well. One of the best suggestions of this text I've seen is to take it as permission to think through all our failures in life. Those are like water. And ask God to turn them into wine. Where we hurt most is where God does his best healing.

Catholics and Protestants have very different approaches to Mary. Catholics will often pray to Mary. And this is a story that they'll point to. Jesus doesn't want to do a miracle. Hey lady I'm here at a wedding minding my own business leave me alone. But she tells the servants to do whatever he says, Jesus says oh alright, and turns 150 gallons of water into wine. Catholics say hey! Mary can get Jesus to do stuff he doesn't want to do! Sometimes in the middle ages Jesus would be depicted as a judge, terrifying, willing to send us to hell. But Mary was kind, merciful, she'd put her cloak over us and protect us from her Son. Protestants point to this same passage and say see! Jesus rebukes his mom. Other places he says his family isn't biological, it's whoever believes. At Vatican II in the 1960s Catholics moved Mary from the middle of the church to the side. A friend jokes that we Protestants move her from the side right on out the building. We never mention her. But wait! God is knitting the universe back together, Protestants and Catholics included, especially. My grandmother was an everyday mass Catholic, tried to be a nun but they rejected her. My other grandmother was a Baptist who prayed for me to accept Jesus. We Methodists are kind of Catholic Baptist hybrids. We want Jesus in our hearts and Jesus in our sacraments. U2 comes from Ireland, a land troubled by violence between Protestants and Catholics. As a kid I rocked out to their song "Where the Streets Have No Name." I only recently learned what they're singing about. In Northern Ireland you can tell whether a neighborhood is Catholic or Protestant by its street name. It's a map of violence. Their song is about the kingdom of God where the streets have no name. This is no map of violence it's a map of grace. We've been blessed to have Catholics

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<sup>4</sup> [http://www.eikonbibleart.com/images/eikon\\_1143\\_02.jpg](http://www.eikonbibleart.com/images/eikon_1143_02.jpg)

<sup>5</sup> <https://radianceonline.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/11-mary-john-below-the-cross-2.jpg>

become part of our church here at Boone Methodist—we're a good meeting place for those of different denominations because we focus on Jesus, all are attracted. So let's agree Protestants and Catholics with what Mary tells us to do: do whatever he tells you. That's why she's on the planet to birth a Son and then stand in awe of him, like any mother. But the one she births is salvation. He births new life among us. All people will one day worship him. And this is Mary's word to us: do whatever Jesus tells you.

<sup>6</sup>Point two today, the wine. When I've preached this text to you before I focused on the wine. At my and Jaylynn's wedding we had this text ready to be read. Our pastor came to us in a huff right before. "We're having communion." Yes. "There's grape juice out there." Correct. This was just like right before church, people rush up to me with details when I have other things on my mind, you'd have thought he'd a known better. Then he surprised and delighted me, he said "I'm not doing it!" and ran to Food Lion to buy wine to preside properly. This is not a very Lenten text, not a text of repentance or doing without. It's a text about a party, because that's what the kingdom is. Not a list of frowny faced rules to ruin your day or hurt people. It's a feast where Jesus pours out 150 gallons of extra wine on a bunch of peasants who are already soused. Then there's this little speech, given by someone speaking a truth he's not aware of: <sup>7</sup>"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."<sup>8</sup> Here's a bottle of wine, looks ordinary to my eye, it cost, wait for it, \$12,000. The archbishop of Paris called it "velvet and satin in a bottle." I'm guessing I wouldn't know the difference from something that cost \$3. This is the sort of wine Jesus provides for those who aren't even paying attention anymore.

Why and for what? This is a genuine puzzle, especially if you're convinced Christianity and alcohol don't mix. Why would Jesus ruin all that perfectly good water by turning it into undrinkable wine?! I've preached that they do from this pulpit before and you all didn't run me off. How can I think that? Well because the bible does.<sup>9</sup> In scripture wine is a sign of God's blessing and bounty.<sup>10</sup> It's an appropriate drink for a thank offering to God in the temple,<sup>11</sup> it should be shared especially with those for whom nothing is prepared on the day of the Lord,<sup>12</sup> it's a sign of God's renewed covenant with Israel,<sup>13</sup> it's the drink of lovers and the very symbol of love,<sup>14</sup> and its absence is the end of all joy.<sup>15</sup> Most importantly for us, Jesus makes it a sign of his blood shed for us, he promises to drink with us again in the kingdom, he promises to be with us when we share wine with one another, and the Holy Spirit uses it as a sign of Pentecost. Whatever else we may think of wine the bible thinks it's a powerful sign. I was on a panel with some other ministers about alcoholism in our community, and sure enough many drink too much. Another minister of another denomination insisted to me that was all grape juice. Really? When Song of Songs praises the lover by saying this,<sup>16</sup> "your kisses are like the best wine that goes down smoothly, gliding over lips and teeth," that's really grape juice? The other minister wasn't impressed by my litany of bible verses. Sorry man, thought you were a bible guy. What's really happening there is that Baptists and Methodists a century ago saw men coming home drunk and abusing their families. They thought to turn off the alcohol and women and children would be safer, men more godly.

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<sup>6</sup> II. The wine

<sup>7</sup> Jn 2:10 up plz

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/food/article-2828472/The-10-expensive-bottles-wine-world-revealed.html>

<sup>9</sup> For these next just list the verse chapter and number please. For here list Gen. 27:28, Deut 7:13 & 11:14, Ps 104:15, Prov 3:10, Is 25:6 & 65:8, Jer 31:12, Joel 2:19-24 & 3:18, Amos 9:13-14 & Zech 9:17.

<sup>10</sup> Ex. 29:40, Lev 23:13, Num 15:5-10 & 18:12 & 28:14, Deut 14:23, 15:14 & 18:4.

<sup>11</sup> Neh. 8:10

<sup>12</sup> Is 55:1-3

<sup>13</sup> Song of Songs 5:1, 7:2, 7:9 & 8:2

<sup>14</sup> Isaiah 24:11

<sup>15</sup> Mark 15:23, Mt 27:34, Acts 2:13

<sup>16</sup> Song of Songs 7:9 on screen plz

Prohibition, brought to you by Methodists, you're welcome world. It didn't work. Now we realize that alcoholism is still a problem, we are committed to AA and NA here, I've heard more than one of you say you wish alcoholic parents had had access to that, I wish my alcoholic mom had been cured of her alcoholism. So we honor our tradition of saying no to alcohol. We also see Jesus using it as a sign of himself. What's he mean by it?

Charles Wesley said of water in this verse,<sup>17</sup> "Water saw her maker and blushed." Water is good, life giving. No one can live in a dry place for long and not develop a longing for water. We have it here in Boone, we want to grow and need water. Ashe County needs water too, and arguments between our two counties are not resolved. Well that's uncomfortably close, let's try something farther away. They say wars in the next century will be fought over water.<sup>18</sup> Rio de Janeiro in Brazil has 60 days of water left, and then the taps go dry. What then? See how precious water becomes at that point. Wine is unnecessarily exuberant. It's a drink of joy. God takes what's good, what's necessary, but what's tasteless, and transforms it into something blood red, blush inducing, intoxicating. That's how God works. God takes Israel, his chosen, whom he loves, and transfigures her into church, for all peoples, salvation for the world. God takes us and our good lives, and fills them with joy, delight, with himself. This is why we want all people to know Jesus, because Jesus is delight itself.

<sup>19</sup>So back to our question. Why does Jesus sass his mom. Because his hour is not yet. His hour is his cross, when he will show us God's love to the fullest.<sup>20</sup> Some images of Christ on the cross have blood from his side flowing into a goblet for us. Mary wants him to work a miracle to save a party, to save a host from embarrassment, to save a bride and groom from a bad first day of their marriage. Jesus says no. He saves his glory for bigger things. But then he does what mamma says. And we see his glory here out of season. Before its time a little bit of the kingdom breaks out. *And no one knows!* Seriously, only his disciples and his mom. Not even the groom or his house know who has saved them from social scandal. Good thing they added Jesus to the guest list eh? Imagine the conversation. Ugh, do we have to invite him? He brings his twelve friends everywhere! No idea he would show his glory first there.

Cana is not an important town. We don't even know where it is now. Nothing in the Old Testament happened there. This is not an important miracle. It's not in the other gospels. Just here. And here in John it's his first. The one that paves the way for the others. And it's remarkably unnecessary. No one is healed, raised from the dead, no one even gives Jesus credit for it. It's just a glimpse. A blush. A quiet sign of what's to come. And a party kept going.

And here's what it says to us. Look for Jesus everywhere. Even in the most unexpected places. Because you can find him there. In every bit of social awkwardness, like the family must have felt, like Mary must have felt. Look for the blood red goodness there. Because it's there. In every unexpected miracle. St. Augustine asks why people should be surprised that water becomes wine. What we should be surprised at is that God makes water and wine both in the first place. Miracles surround us and we miss them because they're regularly predictable. Stop and give God thanks for every drop of water, every drop of wine, every glance from one another. And mostly this, for every sign that Jesus is God among us, life of the party, stop and give thanks. He has come so that everything that is might recognize its maker and blush. Amen.

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<sup>17</sup> Quote up, attributed to CW

<sup>18</sup> <http://blog.guesttoguest.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/2.-christ-the-reedemer.jpg>

<sup>19</sup> III. The Why

<sup>20</sup> [https://aedificatiodei.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/precious\\_blood\\_pic.jpg](https://aedificatiodei.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/precious_blood_pic.jpg)

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<sup>i</sup> I owe this litany to David B. Hart's *The Beauty of the Infinite*.