

SERMON
First Lutheran Church
Aitkin, Minnesota

John 2:1-11
Rev. Darrell J. Pedersen
January 14, 2018

CHILDREN'S MESSAGE

Good morning kids. Today I would like to tell you about a **party**, actually a **wedding** that Jesus attended. Jesus, his mother, Mary, and some of Jesus' friends attended a wedding together. Part way through the wedding meal/party, the wine ran out. People used wine to help celebrate the young couple getting married. If the wine ran out, the party would be over and everyone would be sad. It would be like inviting your friends to come to your house for an ice cream sundae party and then discovering that you hadn't bought enough ice cream. Some people wouldn't get a sundae. You would be **embarrassed** and your friends would be **disappointed** and everybody would be **sad**.

Kids, I'd like to have a little Hershey's Kisses party right now. I'd like to give each of you a Hershey's Kiss to enjoy. Please throw the wrappers in the garbage.

When they started running out of wine at the wedding, Jesus' mom, Mary, asked Jesus to do something. He, at first, said it wasn't their problem, but then he ended up turning some **ordinary water** into **120-180 gallons** of **wonderful new wine**. The joyful wedding could continue because of what Jesus did. Jesus maybe thought he had more important things to do than making new wine. Jesus came to bring everyone close to God, heal sick people and forgive sins. But then Jesus decided helping people to have a joyous celebration together was a good thing for him to do as well.

Would you kids like another Hershey's Kiss? Oh, I don't have enough for everyone to get one. I'm embarrassed. You are disappointed. Everybody is sad. Just like what happened at the wedding Jesus, his mom and friends attended. But wait, our ushers have some more Hershey's Kisses! I can give each of you another treat. We can be happy about that. Our little party can continue. When Jesus turned water into wine, his first miracle, his friends, disciples, learned that Jesus could make a difference in their lives and world. As time passed, they saw Jesus do all sorts of wonderful things to make the world a better, more loving, caring

place. He fed hungry people, forgave sinners, shared good news, help and hope with worried people. He even died so we could all know how much God loves us and **how far God will go to save God's children**. Jesus loves us so much.

Pretty soon, Jesus' friends were doing the same kinds of things with Jesus. After Jesus died, came back from the dead and rose to be with God in heaven, Jesus' friends **kept on working to love the world like God does**. They passed along Jesus' love to everyone. Today, dear kids, you can do the same. The ushers gave me enough Hershey's Kisses so that you can help to share two each with every person here. They can be **reminders to us** of how **Jesus still moves to bring joy, love and celebration** into our lives and world. And together we can do the other loving things Jesus did too. Thanks for your help and thanks be to God. Amen.

ADULT MESSAGE

What do you do when the party is over, when the celebration seems to be ending? Everything was going well at that ancient wedding in Cana, until the wine of celebration started to run out. . . Everything was going great in my life, until I spotted blood in my urine. . .

During my recent hospitalization, once the medical talk was done, I started visiting with my nurse about how she decided to get into health care. This fifty-something woman said that it was almost a "**God thing**." When she was a little girl, her mom was a nurse. As a four-year-old, she remembered her mom, just home from work and still dressed in her nursing uniform, holding her in her arms. Mom appeared to be an angel to this little girl. From that moment on, she determined that she wanted to be a nurse too.

The story went on. My nurse started her career as a certified nursing assistant in a nursing home. It didn't take much training, but the pay was low and she and her husband had a family to support. It happened one morning. She woke up and found that God had put it into her mind that now was the time to become a registered nurse. She told her husband and kids that this would take lots of schooling, hard work and time away from home and family. They all agreed to support her effort.

Long story short, she started commuting to school. Soon, her husband left, leaving her and the kids high and dry. She kept going to school, lost her house, went through bankruptcy and finally earned her degree. Soon she had a better paying job at St. Joseph's hospital. Her family is doing well and her goal is to work 12 more years until retirement. She believes that **God blessed her to be a blessing to others**. All these years, she has trusted God to care for her through thick and thin. As I lay in my hospital bed, facing an uncertain future, **God's nurse** was a blessing for me. This **nurse** brought God's encouraging word to the **pastor** she cared for. That day I was working to trust God with my own life as well.

Blood in my urine. A scope in my bladder. Surgery to remove a tumor. For four days, a catheter attached to a place you don't want to know. Benign? Cancerous? Will my bladder need to be removed? These are the thoughts that have drifted through my mind over the past week. I've visited hundreds of cancer patients over the years. I've told them, "**One day at a time. Trust God to safely see you through, no matter what the outcome of tests, surgery, therapy and all the rest.**" Now it was the pastor's turn to listen to his own teachings. To trust God for himself. . .

Maybe a week before I discovered the blood in my urine, I said to my wife, Jennifer, "**I am so thankful for my life. I have been so blessed with family, friends, church family, this amazing world and God's love and care. If I died tomorrow, I would be thankful for my great life and have no regrets.**" That wasn't the first time that she'd heard me speak these words over the years.

Dr. Gerhard Frost, my seminary professor, told the story of the old Norwegian women speaking from her death bed. Before dying, she said, "**Takk for Alt.**" He called it her "**home going word.**" It means, "**Thanks for everything.**" And that "**everything**" means all the treasures of life – every morsel of **food**, every sip of **water**, every breath of **air**, every **good person**, every glimpse of God's **amazing creation**. And, **most important** and best gift of all – **life as a child of the God** who has **promised to love and care** for us **every day** of our lives and for **all of eternity.**" **Thanks, God, for everything.**

“I am so thankful for the life I’ve been given.” You may have spoken similar words. If I were to die tomorrow, I would be just fine. I have been so blessed that I would not be disappointed if I had to die. And then, even better, comes the promise of eternal life with God and all of God’s people – Mom and Dad, Grandmas and Grandpas. . . Joy restored. And some day a great family reunion.

And whenever I leave, I also trust God’s faithful provision for those I leave behind. Today the **celebration continues here** because of our so very loving and faithful God. But for now, one day at a time. Loving and trusting God. Loving and caring for neighbor and creation. Doing whatever I can to properly care for my own self.

There was a wedding at **Cana in Galilee**. Out in the boondocks. It was a celebration of a life-long commitment between two people who gathered with family and friends **to ask God’s blessing**. Excited couple. Proud parents. Happy guests. Good life. Week-long celebration. We don’t know why the wine was running out. In that day, guests were to bring wine to add to the feast. Maybe some people were too poor to contribute. Maybe Mary, Jesus and his disciples were too poor to bring some wine. Maybe the parents were too poor. The wine was running out. The party would end.

What do you do when your **life celebration is interrupted**? Mary, Jesus’ mother, knew that he might be able to make a difference. She asked Jesus to help. He responded, **“Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.”** Jesus hadn’t done any miracles yet. He maybe figured that he should be **starting God’s ministry of love** with **some truly life-giving, life-changing work**. This wine only provided **“temporary” joy and celebration**, one week of partying. Jesus wanted to bring **“eternal” joy and celebration** for God’s people. Maybe Jesus even had God’s gift of a **love-stained cross** in mind that day. Nevertheless, Jesus went on to turn six 20-30 gallon stone jars of **water** into the **finest wine**. He used the water for the **Jewish rite of “purification”** to make **amazing wine of “celebration.”** Jesus took this water, used to ritually wash and **help people purify themselves** to come into God’s presence for the wedding, and Jesus turned it into **celebration wine**. It was extraordinary wine, the best wine, far better than the wine that the host or anyone else had been able to provide. Jesus took a human ritual meant to make them **“worthy” to come to God** and instead **brought God’s**

“pure gift” of love, grace, joy and celebration to them. Jesus cared enough to save this back woods wedding party from ending in shame and disappointment. Maybe **Jesus’ first miracle was bigger than it at first seems.** Maybe **turning human efforts to come to God** into **God’s gracious, loving and abundant coming to us** is what is truly at the **center of Jesus’ earthly mission.** Is life all about us trying to be **good enough for God?** **Or** is life all about **how good God is for us?** Are our celebrations dependent upon our **hard work,** upon **our desserts,** upon **what we have paid for?** Or are our celebrations **just one more gift from a God** who loves and cares for us every day of our lives and even to our death and beyond? **Know this,** dear sisters and brothers of Jesus, our **deepest, richest, finest, most joyful life** comes as **pure gift from Almighty God!**

What do you do when the wine runs out? When the party seems to be ending? When the celebration of life comes to a screeching halt? When the diagnoses are **cancer, Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, Fibromyalgia, depression, chemical dependency, job loss, burned down house, death of a loved one?** **You can try to do everything possible yourself.** And you can let your **friends and family step up too.** **But** the **last and best hope,** as a matter of fact, the **first hope, always hope** is the One who turns water into wine. Who turns our lives from **hopeless to hopeful,** from **helpless to empowered, from sadness to joy restored.**

I’ve been visiting cancer patients for about 40 years now. I have offered **prayers** for healing, **words of comfort and encouragement** and the **promise that God has a good, firm hold** on every one of God’s beloved children and will **never leave us, give up on us** or **let us go.** **God will get us through.** And in the end, live or die, our **joy will be restored.** I’ve **seen that promise and hope** in **God’s nurse** who cared for me in my hospital bed this week. I’ve seen that promise and hope in **many of you.** And, most of all, I **see that promise and hope in Jesus as we gather together with him in this place today.** **New, amazing wine** for you and for me. **Jesus. Takk for Alt. Jesus. Thanks for everything, God.** Amen.