

An Abundant Life | John 2:1-11

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In Christ, God has come to bring abundant life to His people.

Me →

It was probably one of the most disappointing days of my life. For months I had been working the soil and tending to the plants growing in my little garden plot. I had spent hours preparing the ground, tilling the soil, planting the seeds, watering, weeding, more watering, and more weeding. And then...finally, the plants not only began to sprout but eventually they began to grow and bear fruit!

My tomatoes were blossoming, the beans were producing, and there were even beautiful cucumbers growing on the vine!

Wow, I thought! I really did it! I finally achieved my goal of planting a garden and actually eating from it. It took hours of hard work under the hot summer sun, but it was totally worth it as I snacked on some of my newly harvested produce.

But then, that fateful day came. I remember it well...it was a Saturday in early July. I was fresh off the 4th of July holiday and I went to the seminary campus to check on my garden. But as I approached I noticed that something wasn't right. Where there had once been green, vibrant life there was now only sickly, wilted vines. Coming closer I began to see the problem. Some evil creature, a rogue rabbit or satanic squirrel had chewed clear through my cucumber vines and it had taken small bites out of all of my most promising vegetables, and just left them to rot in the sun.

My garden had been decimated. And I was inconsolable. I stood there, angry. Hurt. Confused.

After all that effort. After all the excitement and pride, it only took some small disgusting rodent to crush my dreams.

We →

I got over it, I assure you. But what I experienced that day is actually a feeling that often follows us through life. It's the feeling of putting forth all your effort: time, money, relational capital, and never seeming to come out ahead. It's the feeling you get at the end of the month when you realize that, after paying all your bills, there's nothing left over. And as you go paycheck to paycheck, the stress weighs you down. If only we had just a little bit more, you say, then we would be fine.

Or perhaps it's the feeling you get when, after taking care of the kids, going to work, trying to get something done at home, there's no time left over for you or for the friends you haven't seen in months, for that Pinterest project that's still collecting dust in the corner.

Time and money. They never seem to be things that we have in abundance. Indeed, there never seems to be an abundance of anything despite the hard work we put in day after day.

God →

Our Gospel reading for this morning, however, points us to a greater reality, promised to us by Jesus. It points us toward an abundant life which, unlike a prosperity Gospel which promises material wealth and health, it's an abundant life which promises an eternal life filled with God's grace and mercy.

This text, this story of Jesus turning water into wine, has certainly been interpreted and used in a variety of different ways throughout history. Our wedding liturgy uses it to say that it is proof Jesus blesses the institution of marriage. Recently people have enjoyed using the text as a proof against the teetotalers that Jesus approves of drinking alcohol or that he likes a good party. I don't really disagree with that, but those things aren't actually the point of the text.

No, remembering that we take up this text in the season of Epiphany helps us to see the greater point that Jesus is making through this rather simple, odd act. In Epiphany, through this series we're in called *The Insiders*, we've been focusing our attention on God's gift of salvation for the entire world. It began with the Magi on the day of Epiphany. Then last week we looked at how God is calling his creation, by name, back to himself. How does God feel about creation? He loves it, he has redeemed it, and he is present with us.

This week, that theme continues. Through this sign which Jesus performs at Cana we see two things. First, God in Christ has decisively entered into this world. But second, we see that, through Jesus, God is actively fulfilling His promises of healing and restoration for the entire world. Salvation is not just for the Jews, no it's actually for the *entire creation*. The sign Jesus performs at Cana points to these truths.

If we're going to see what all this text is pointing us to, we have to take it all in. Not just the miracle itself, but everything about it. See, it's no accident that the setting for this narrative is a wedding. Marriage is an image that Scripture uses over and over to talk about God's relationship with His people. In Hosea Israel is depicted as an *unfaithful* spouse but God an ever-faithful, forgiving husband. *Our OT lesson serves in this capacity as well...*

But as far as wedding days go, this one that we encounter in John 2 seems to be taking a turn for the worse. A major faux pas has occurred...the groom didn't bring enough wine to the party. And this is no simple party foul...his guests will be insulted and the celebration will be ruined. Can you imagine the stigma this young couple will face as they go through life? They'll be "those people" who threw the biggest flop of a wedding party Cana had ever seen.

But then Jesus' mother gets involved. And she pulls Jesus into it as well quite against his will.

And just like that, where we were once on the edge of deficiency and embarrassment, Jesus steps in and provides an *abundance*. Jesus doesn't prive just a little bit. Jesus doesn't provide just barely enough. And he doesn't just provide mediocre. No, he provides the best and he provides it in *mass quantity*. In today's terms, Jesus brings to this wedding at Cana between 600-900 bottles of the best wine money can buy.

Then at the end of our lesson, John gives us a recap of the events and points us to a greater truth. This wasn't some party trick. This was Jesus showing us what He's all about. He's about fulfilling God's promises. The prophet Amos writes of a time when God will restore his people and his creation. And the image he uses?

Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows the seed; the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine, and they shall make gardens and eat their fruit. (Amos 9:13-14)

When Amos describes the salvation and restoration of God's people, his go-to image is an abundance of wine, dripping from the mountains, flowing from the hills. What we have at Cana, then, is a sign...a signal. A sign that Jesus is the One who will bring about these days which God has promised to his people. It's a sign that, in Jesus, this future has begun. And at Cana we see a glimpse of what that future will look like. At Cana we see Jesus manifest his glory. Where there was once deficiency, there is abundance. Where there was once fear and angst, there is now only joy and celebration.

This is what all of Jesus' signs in John's gospel point to. Healings...feeding of the 5,000...but most of all his resurrection. These are all signs of the abundant life which Jesus brings to His people.

But of course this abundant life comes through suffering. It comes through the cross. When Jesus is first asked by his mother to help, he replies enigmatically, 'my hour has not yet come'. That hour would be the hour of his crucifixion and resurrection. The moment in time when Jesus gave up his life so that we would not be destined for an eternity of deficiency and hopelessness. But so that we would have eternal life in Him.

This is what our text for this morning demonstrates. Indeed, John follows this up in John 20, after Jesus' resurrection and his appearance to Thomas, John develuges the purpose for his writing:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in His name.

What Jesus demonstrates as Cana isn't simply that he likes a good party. No, what Jesus demonstrates for us is that, in his ministry, a dramatic shift has occurred. It's a shift that has reversed that curse of Eden. It's a shift that has reversed the effects of sin on this world. It's a shift that has overcome death and all the power of the devil.

It's a shift that we experience through the grace of God and his forgiveness here and now. But it's also a shift which is still not fully ours. The devil still send his minions to decimate our gardens. Death still hangs over our heads.

But in His Word, Jesus continues to show us his signs. Signs of Joy and life and abundance that show us that his mission is to bring us *eternal* joy and life and abundance. Of course He gives us these good things even now. Time spent celebrating with family and friends. The birth of a child or grandchild. An afternoon sitting on the back patio with a drink or a book or a friend. But there is never enough...time or money or joy or celebrations. The curse of Eden is still upon us.

But we've seen the signs. We've seen wine practically flowing from the hills at this wedding in Cana. We've seen a man, a crucified and buried and, after three days we see him get up and walk out of the grave. This, friends, is our hope, our joy, our life - right now - even as we wait for Jesus to come and invite us to his wedding feast where there will be abundant life. Amen.