

the
difference



John 2:1-11

Jesus Changes Everything

Vienna Presbyterian Church
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John 2:1-11

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Over the Christmas holiday, I played Wii, which I hadn't played in a long time. I learned then that my Mii characters, along with others, had mysteriously been deleted from the system. I don't play that much, but I had achieved professional status in bowling, so I was annoyed that it had all been wiped away. I suggested to my family that all of us should reset our Mii characters so that each of us would have a new beginning and an even playing field for 2017. So that is what we are going to do.

But the truth is, there are far more significant areas of my life that need to be reset, and a new year always provides opportunities for new beginnings to be the me God wants me to be. In fact, I have been working with the word "reset" since attending the DC Together gathering on the Mall this past July. The message was that Jesus Changes Everything, so those present were invited to reset—to have a second chance—to get beyond past missteps and refocus our lives around Jesus' power to change everything—life, marriage, family, work schedules, broken relationships, you name it.



The Setting:

The Setting: Our passage for today, an account of Jesus' first miracle, gives us a wonderful invitation to experience a reset—a new beginning in a new year. The setting is a wedding in Cana, not far from Jesus'

hometown of Nazareth. Jesus, his mother, and his disciples are invited, perhaps, because this was where Jesus' disciple Nathanael is from.

Weddings were important occasions in Jewish culture, lasting days—even as long as a week—with many, many people. They included a series of entertainment and a lot of food and wine. Jesus partakes in the occasion affirming the importance of celebrating special occasions with great joy.

But a problem arises. The wine runs out, and this is no small matter. Culturally, this would be a huge social embarrassment. So,

Mary, concerned for the wedding party and the family, comes to her oldest son, whose resourcefulness she has undoubtedly come to rely on. It's not likely that she was actually expecting a miracle, but she is hoping that he will do something.

Jesus gives an interesting response: "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." This may sound harsh to our modern ears, but Jesus frequently



addressed women with the greeting, "Woman," which would be like saying "lady" or "ma'am" in our day. It was a courteous but not intimate greeting, which is why it is an unusual way to address his mother. The phrase, translated "What concern is that to you and to me?", was a common Aramaic expression. In speaking as he does, Jesus is creating distance between himself and Mary by playing down their family relationship.

When Jesus states, "My hour has not yet come," he makes clear his razor-sharp focus. To fulfill his mission, Jesus must be set apart from his natural relationships freeing himself from all human influence, advice, or control, even that of his own mother. Everything, including family ties, had to be subordinated to his divine mission that will culminate at the right time in the events of his death, resurrection, and ascension. Jesus' actions from now on will be governed by the hour set by God, not by anyone else's time or will.

Mary responds, "Whatever he tells you to do, you do it!" She is clearly not offended by his words. Rather than resenting Jesus, she recommends him to the waiters. In the midst of this embarrassing situation, she makes clear what is to be done. In essence, Mary says, "Trust Jesus." This is important. Later in the Gospel, Jesus is asked, "What should we be doing so that we are doing the works of God?"

“This is the work of God: that you trust the one he sent” John 6:29-30

He replies, “This is the work of God: that you trust the one he sent” (6:29-30). The most important work that we will see over and over again throughout John’s Gospel is to trust

Jesus.

Well, what do we learn from this setting? This passage is often used as the Gospel text for weddings, and it’s a good reminder that marriage matters to God; however, all marriages will come up empty. It’s not just the wine that runs out. There will always be crises, emergencies, problems of one kind or another, in every marriage. If that is true, then each married couple needs to find ways to allow Christ to continue to touch and transform their lives and marriage.

I encourage you to consider investing time and energy in your marriage by attending The Art of Marriage seminar later this month. You can find more information at the connect desk or online.

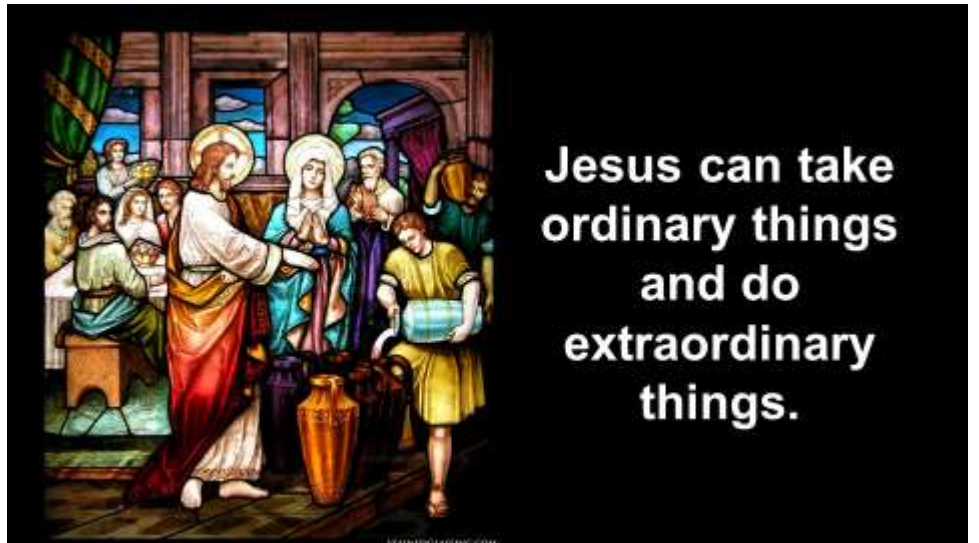
It is not just weddings and marriages that come up empty. We will all discover, over and over, that our human sufficiency is never enough. Our normal means of caring for ourselves in all the occasions and circumstances of our lives always come up short.

The good news is that Jesus is equal to the crisis. Jesus changes everything and is there to meet the challenges—whatever they are. Like Mary, we are invited to trust Jesus as we listen to his words, surrender to his ways, and obey his will. This means letting go of control and letting God do in and through and for us what only He can do in His time and in His way. We can trust that Jesus Changes Everything.

The Sign: It is so amazing that Jesus turned water into wine. I would have loved to have seen that. However, the truth is that no one present at that wedding actually saw when or how this miracle happened. What did they know? The wine was gone, and the jars or pots were empty.

Let's talk about these pots. These pots were normally used for washing. In the Jewish tradition, people became symbolically unclean by touching objects of everyday life, so before eating, they would pour water over their hands to cleanse themselves of any bad influences associated with what they had touched.

Jesus tells the servants to fill the empty pots with water and then take some to the headwaiter, who is confused that there is more wine and that it is



spectacularly different and better than what was served before. The fact that water was turned into wine tells us that Jesus can take ordinary things and do extraordinary things.

How much wine are we talking about? There were six stone jars—each holding about 20-30 gallons. Think of a jug used for milk. That would be 150 gallon jugs of wine—that's a lot of wine!

The amount of the wine emphasizes the extravagant, abundant, overflowing grace of Jesus. Grace is God doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves. Ultimately, Jesus saves us from our sin so that we can not only be forgiven but enjoy a life that is overflowing. Jesus' grace helps us in our real life right here and now—even those circumstances we face when we feel we come up empty. Some of us might struggle with learning a subject at school, being left out of a circle of friends, or even having a friend turn away from us for reasons we will never know or understand. Others are dealing with grief, illness, financial stress, broken relationships, or any number of losses. Even in these tough situa-

tions, Jesus wants us to trust him and his grace do to for us what we can't do for ourselves.

Taste & see
THAT THE LORD IS
good.
Psalm 34:8

Not only was there a lot of wine, it was much better than what had originally been served to the guests at the wedding party. The quality of the wine makes clear the extra-ordinary goodness

of Jesus. One of my favorite Psalms says, “Taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8). I am not some-one who can distinguish between different wines. However, I can tell the difference between different coffees and chocolates, and I really like them both.

Jesus wants us to know his goodness is far sweeter than anything we could eat or drink or any other good gifts we might enjoy. Jesus wants us to enjoy him—the giver of every good gift, and he wants us to experience his goodness in our lives. This goodness is not found in what we do, what we have, or what other people think of us. This goodness is found in Jesus.

Finally, this wasn't just a miracle. In the Gospel of John, miracles of Jesus are always referred to as a sign. A sign is something that points to something beyond itself—in this case, Jesus. So the miracle was a sign pointing to Jesus and something about him.

Some of you may have been here on Christmas Eve when we learned some words about Jesus and I said we would learn another word today. The word for today is “glory.” This miracle of turning water to wine was a sign that points to the glory of Jesus. Glory refers to the presence of God Himself. In Jesus, we see who God is and what He is like. In Jesus, God had come near, and the essence of His character had broken through.

Here is the most important point. Because Jesus' glory was revealed, the disciples believed in him. They don't know

everything about Jesus. They don't know anything about the cross or the resurrection or the ascension, which are the ultimate ways the glory of God is revealed, but they see enough that they believe, and they begin to live what they believe. Jesus wants us to believe him and live for him, too.

And now comes the “**So what?**” Jesus turned an astonishing quantity of water into wine. So what difference does this passage make in my life? What difference does Jesus' glory make in my life and in our 2017 world? I want to make several reflections that I hope will answer those questions. The truth is Jesus changes everything! And I do mean everything!



Everything our Lord touches he transforms. If we will allow him to touch our lives, Jesus can transform us. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has

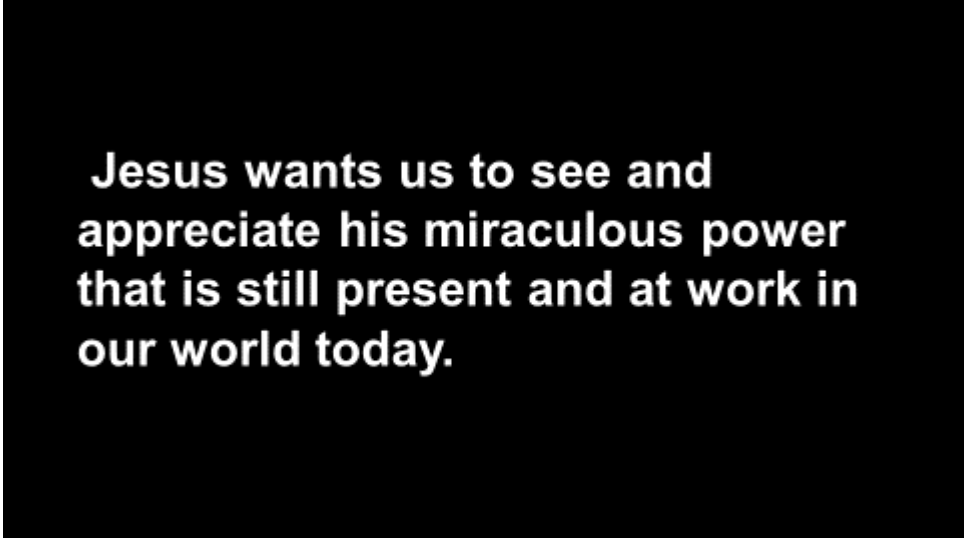
come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). This is not a one-time moment of conversion and we're done. This is an ongoing journey of transformation that will not be completed until we see Jesus face to face.

I was reminded of that truth while re-reading *The Deeper Journey*, by Robert Mulholland, Jr. This is one of the books for the Growing Your Soul 2 small groups. Though I have read the book many times before, it spoke to me in ways I needed to hear at this juncture of my life. I can't share all that I learned but Mulholland challenges our casual and complacent attitude toward sin and calls us to recognize that beneath the veneer of our religiosity lives “a pervasive and deeply entrenched, self-referenced being which is driven by its own agendas, its own desires, its own purposes, and that ,no amount of superficial tinkering with the religious façade can make any appreciable difference....There is no way out as far as our own resources and abilities are concerned.”

This is another way of saying we all come up empty. We all need to be touched and transformed, but we can't do it ourselves. So what do we do? Well, I can tell you that New Year's resolutions that rely on willful determination are not going to cut it. I'm telling you as one who knows, we can't change ourselves.

What can we do? We can follow Mary's example. As we trust Jesus' deep and abiding love, grace, and goodness, we are in a posture of receiving from God what only He can give. As we let go of our agendas and let God be God in our lives on His terms, we surrender to His good and perfect will. As we take up our crosses daily, we follow Jesus in obedience, allowing him to conform us to his image. As we continue to allow Jesus to touch and transform our lives, we are engaging in the ongoing process of becoming like Christ.

The next reflection I want to make is that Jesus wants us to see and appreciate his miraculous power that is still present and at work in our world today. Jesus's glory—his ongoing presence and power—are always changing things. But there is often a hiddenness in Lord's glory. That first miracle of turning water to wine was known only by a few, but the disciples knew, believed, and went on to change the world. The only question is this: do we have the eyes to see and appreciate how Jesus is changing everything?



Jesus wants us to see and appreciate his miraculous power that is still present and at work in our world today.

This week, I read the marvelous book *The Insanity of God: A True Story of Faith Resurrected* by Nik Ripken. It is the story of his own journey in missions to Somaliland in the early 90s and the question of why God allows such terrible things to happen. In the book, he shares about the countless interviews he has done with persecuted believers around the world and what he has learned. I was humbled and challenged by the stories I read about:

- Many believers around the world don't have a Bible, while most of us have multiple versions that often simply sit on our shelves.
- A group of pastors in China ripped apart a copy of the only Bible they had so each one could take one book of the Bible to teach the people back in their house church.
- Even though they didn't have Bibles of their own, students at the Moscow Youth Conference in 1956 were able to put together the entire four Gospels from memory in just two days; they had hidden the word of God in their hearts.
- A Russian believer who was imprisoned seventeen years said that the isolation from the body of Christ was more painful than any physical punishment he received. In contrast, we have the freedom and privilege of gathering as God's people whenever and wherever we want, but so many choose not to do so.
- While many around the world can be punished for being in possession of any Christian material, we have access to Christian books, magazines, radio, and so many other sources of information for learning and growing. We have a Christian bookstore and library right here in this building!

After all the interviews, Nik Ripken realizes how much we take for granted in the West. "There are so many things we have allowed to become common,

There are so many things we have allowed to become common, things that would be considered miracles in the eyes of millions of believers in persecution. Nik Ripken

things that would be considered miracles in the eyes of millions of believers in persecution. The truth is these things that we take for granted are all miracles!"

I was challenged by this book, and I want to challenge you with this question: How will each of us individually and all of us collectively arrange our lives in 2017 to see and appreciate the

miraculous power of God still present and at work in the world today?

Let's get into the flow of Jesus' glory and power. For the next five months, we are going to be studying the Gospel of John. I want to challenge each and every one of us—children, students, and adults—to make it a priority. Read, study, meditate, and even memorize God's word. The daily devotions are out today and give ideas about how to do that. If you need a Bible, check out the back page of the bulletin for how to get one. This is not about getting more information. This is about transformation—allowing Jesus to use the word of God to touch and transform our lives so that we become more like him.

Gather with others in a group or class to grow together as you study scripture, pray, and share life together. We experience Jesus' presence and power in community, so be present and consistent realizing that God will work as you simply show up.

Commit to weekly worship with the body of Christ. Don't underestimate how the presence, power, and glory of God are experienced when we come together as the body of Christ to bless God and give Him the honor He is due. Let's be present to God and to each other, trusting His power and glory to do the greater works in and through us He promised to do.



That leads to the final reflection: Jesus wants to use us to make a difference in our 2017 world. Earlier this month, at the beginning of Advent, I visited a

Muslim country, and the words, “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light” kept going through my mind. I was so aware of the spiritual darkness of that place and the need for the light of Christ.

When I returned, I had a greater awareness of what I already knew: so many people in America are also sitting in darkness. We may look around at the affluence and think that people are well-off, but the truth is that anyone without Christ is walking in darkness and in need of the light of Christ's presence.

I want to share another quote from *The Insanity of God*: “The greatest enemy of our faith today is not communism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Atheism, or even Islam. Our greatest enemy is *lostness*. *Lostness* is the terrible enemy that Jesus commissioned His followers to vanquish with the battle strategy that He spelled out for them in Matthew 28:18-20. He was addressing this same enemy when He plainly clarified His purpose in coming: ‘I have come to seek and to save those who are lost.’”

Jesus wants us to see how the world is desperately lost, living in darkness, and utterly empty and in need of a savior. Jesus has the power to intervene in the natural course of the world and of human events and change them as he will. Jesus changes everything, and he wants to use us—his followers—to make a difference in our 2017 world. What a privilege that Jesus wants to involve us in transforming the world. He doesn't have to, but he wants to do so. And he has given us a commission—to make disciples of all nations. So let's do it.

I find comfort, challenge, and even conviction in the truth that Jesus changes everything. And, as I said at the beginning of this sermon, I'm grateful for a new year that brings new opportunities to experience being reset. I don't know about you, but I'm ready for a fresh start. I encourage you to not miss the opportunity to think about what in your life needs to change. This next year will come and go whatever we do, but let each one of us live in such a way with expectation that we will see the glory and miraculous power of Christ in new and unexpected ways as we are becoming like Christ together for the world.

Jesus wants to use us to make a difference in our 2017 world.