

The Good Stuff
John 1:1-14 & 2:1-11

At our annual Christmas Party for the staff the question was asked to everyone, “What was the most memorable gift you ever received at Christmas?” For me the answer was simple. I will never forget walking down our stairs into our den and beholding the mighty Green Machine. Just imagine a Big Wheel with flared rear wheels and two joy sticks for a steering wheel. The Green Machine promised faster speeds, but ever more exciting were the whirling turns, which could be produced by the levers. As an eight or nine year old I felt as though I was probably as close to the NASCAR racing circuit as I would ever get. The cul-de-sac in front of our house made the perfect speedway. Our home sat at the bottom of a long hill and I could zoom down it to amazing speeds and then spin myself into oblivion. That Christmas, it seemed, was made for my Green Machine. That was the Good Stuff that I remember!

Of course, I now know and even knew then that Christmas was not about the presents under the tree but about The Present in the manger—the Lord Jesus Christ. Christmas is about Jesus who is the Good Stuff come to a broken humanity. Yet how can this theological truth capture our hearts with the same energy and excitement as was evident when I got my Green Machine? What should it be like when the message of Christmas becomes more than just a message and has become my very life? What should it be like when I not only know what Christmas is about, but readily see the Christ of Christmas as the Good Stuff of my life?

Christmas is about the best present imaginable showing up at your party. What should it be like when the Good Stuff really shows up?

Setting the Stage:

To help us answer that question I have chosen this passage from John’s Gospel about Jesus’ first miracle—turning water into wine at a local wedding feast.

It seems like such an unlikely place for Jesus to make a point about his glory. William Willimon just says that this is a “weird story.” It seems to have no point. But let’s see if we can mine its truth by setting the stage.

- **Ordinary brokenness**

Most likely this was a wedding feast celebrating the union of someone close to Jesus’ family and his disciples. This is evident by the presence of Jesus’ mother, the disciple and Jesus himself. What is interesting about this situation is that it is so ordinary. It is a wedding celebration, not unlike probably tens of hundreds that took place in our very own city yesterday. Yet in the midst of this ordinary celebration another very ordinary, but shameful problem arose; the bridegroom ran out of wine. Scholars wrangle about how socially embarrassing such an occurrence would have been, but all agree that it would have been a significant embarrassment.

Here is our first clue to how this story connects to Jesus revealing himself as the Good Stuff of our lives. Jesus shows up in the ordinary brokenness of our situations. Whereas, we often want to escape our brokenness or superficially fix it, Jesus wants to use it.

- Unruly kids
- Difficult marriage
- Unsatisfying job
- Disappointment

- **Provocative question**

We know that this is Jesus point by considering how Jesus gets involved in the problem. Wouldn’t you know it? It has to be his mother. Mary points out to Jesus the problem, which is apparently not known to all of the guests. At first it seems she is approaching him as simply her son. “Jesus here’s the problem can you take care of it.” However, Jesus responds with a question of his own, “Woman [not mother], what does this have to do with me?” Literally, it reads, “Woman, what to you and what to me?”

Jesus point is simple: unless you show me how this circumstance connects to my work of salvation then don’t concern me with your trivial concerns. This provocative question addresses all of us, not just Mary. How many of us have come to Jesus with our problems and yet had no real interest in Jesus? We wanted Jesus to fix our problem of “running out of wine” rather than meet Jesus. We want more wine and more “Green Machines”, but Jesus wants to show us that he is the wine of our salvation—the only wine we will ever need.

We want more good stuff, but Jesus wants to reveal himself as The Good Stuff

Now that the stage is set, how does Jesus reveal himself as The Good Stuff?

1) The Good Stuff Really Works

As much fun as it is to use this passage about the legitimacy of drinking fine wine that is not Jesus point. Jesus wants to reveal how this ordinary brokenness associated with running out wine is going to reveal himself as The Good Stuff.

First of all he wants to show himself as **The Good Stuff that really works**. He instructs the servants to go fill up six stone water pots to the brim. John is clear; these are not just any pots. These are water pots for purification associated not with drinking water, but cleansing hands and utensils from their impurity.

Now we think of cleansing as a biological or a health issue. However, Jews in Jesus day saw cleansing as a deeply spiritual issue. Cleansing was strictly regulated by God's word and was commanded for the purpose of ritual purity. Water was used for all kinds of ritual cleansings, including washing silverware, sprinkling holy water and bathing all of one's body. It seems most likely that these pots were for the ritual cleansing associated with the wedding feast and the guests gathered here.

Two truths:

- **Jesus instructs the servants to fill up the jars of water to identify his purpose with purification.**
- **Jesus turns the water into wine to make the old waters of purification obsolete. He shows that the old waters do not really address impurity of people's hearts. Only the new wine provided by Jesus can really work to bring purification.**

Jesus is the only one who can really bring us into the presence of God the Father. No ritual cleansing will work. It doesn't matter if you drench yourself in the every sort of religious ritual; they will not work to transform your life. Only the Jesus of Christmas can cleanse you. The rituals of Christmas have no purifying effect. Look to the Jesus who turns water into wine.

Have you come to a place of personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ?

2) The Good Stuff Comes Last

The second way Jesus reveals himself as The Good Stuff is the emphasis upon the best wine coming last. Even the chief steward seems to be unaware of what has happened. He asks the bridegroom, who was responsible for the wine, why he has waited to bring out the best stuff in verse 10. Everyone knows that you bring the best wine out first, then after people are inebriated you serve the lesser wine.

Of course the answer is not that he has waited. **It is that Jesus has waited to bring the best until last.** By why? Why does Jesus wait to bring the Good Stuff last? The answer is found in Jesus himself in two important ways:

- **Jesus is the good wine that comes last.** Jesus comes after all of the other types and shadows spoken of in the Old Testament have been revealed. **His coming last reveals how imperfect the old dispensation was and how perfect his work of salvation is.** That Jesus wants us to identify himself with the wine is clear in Jn 3:27-30, where John the Baptist clearly identifies Jesus as the Bridegroom who provides the wine for the feast of God's people.
- **Jesus coming last also creates our interest in the Good Stuff.** In our natural fallenness, as I mentioned earlier, we are not really interested in the Good Stuff (Jesus Christ), we are interested in getting fixed, getting whatever it is that we want or getting things solved. By allowing our brokenness to linger, **Jesus creates within us a longing for the Good Stuff.**

What brokenness are you dealing with right now? What situation? What issues? How frustrated are you that God has not seen fit to provide a quick fix to your issues? Why has he let the good wine linger until later? Could it be that he has done so to lead you to himself instead of getting whatever the issue is resolved?

3) The Good Stuff Overflows

The third way Jesus reveals himself as The Good Stuff is in the abundance of the wine. Jesus has instructed six water pots to be filled. Each water pot held between 20-30 gallons of water. That means he produced somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons of the finest wine. **Jesus produced an abundance of wine to emphasis that The Good Stuff overflows into abundant life.** Later in John's Gospel Jesus will remind us that he has come that we might have life and have it abundantly (Jn. 10:10).

The Good Stuff of Jesus overflows into our lives as life itself. We don't understand the Gospel until we understand that we are being offered life in and through Jesus Christ. Life is not something divorced from Jesus—a vacation home, a better job, a nicer wardrobe, a more important appointment, etc. It is Jesus himself. The wine overflows so as to make the point that nothing compares with the wine that he provides in and through himself.

What good stuff are you expecting to overflow this Christmas season: food, clothes, gifts, money, family, etc.? Let me ask you one question, "Will there be enough of whatever it is?" Why is it that we have an insatiable appetite for more? Isn't it because we haven't either discovered the Good Stuff or focused upon him rightly? **Jesus reveals himself as the overflowing and abundant Good Stuff to remind us that he satisfies our thirst for more forever!**

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. (Jn. 7:37).

Tragically this point is missed by so many, including Christians. We want God to bring us stuff instead of realizing that **he is the stuff of life. God becomes the means to our lives instead of the end of our lives!**

In the story before us it seems that the only people who were really aware of the miracle were Mary and the disciples. Even the chief steward didn't get the point of the story. That means that it is possible for the wine to be overflowing and for us to only see wine. In other words, we only see the fruit of Jesus and not Jesus himself.

In verse 11, John makes sure that we get the point of the miracle, "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

That is the deal. Have we "believed in Him" and seen his glory as revealed in the abundance of his mercy that flows from the cross pictured here as the wine of the miracle?