



**A Sermon from Dr. Jody Seymour, Senior Pastor  
Davidson United Methodist Church  
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**The Sermon Text: John 2:1-11**

**Be the Change You Want**

We've had two weddings in our family in the past few years. I'm the father of the bride of course, so that means two things usually; you get to walk your daughter down the aisle and you get to write a lot of checks. But then I got to do more than that since I was also the minister who officiated at the ceremony.

It is customary to give the minister who officiates an honorarium so I told both my daughters I would give them the family discount...but then I realized I would be writing myself a check from the funds I had put there in the first place! I did not write myself a check - but I started to just, for the principal of the thing.

Weddings are special events that often cost a lot of money; the wedding you hear about in today's scripture is no exception. The people of Jesus' day did not have much money, but they still went to great ends to put on a great event when it came to a wedding. The wedding event lasted 7 days, which included all sorts of celebrations culminating in what we would call the reception.

I have great empathy with the story because, as you now know, they ran out of wine at this wedding. Did some poor Dad - and I mean that literally and figuratively - run out of money before he ran out of checks?

A few years ago, a good friend of mine at my last church was telling me about his daughter's upcoming wedding. I would be doing the ceremony and going to the reception afterward. In that region, most of the people had the reception at the Country Club.

Though this guy almost worshiped his only daughter, he did the usual dad thing and complained to me about the ridiculous cost of the wedding. I remembered one thing that was always present at the receptions done by the Club - exceptionally large shrimp. Various people served a variety of food, but you could always count on the shrimp.

I mentioned that to him and that I really liked those shrimp. He then looked at me and said, "Do you know how much those shrimp are a piece?" He then rattled off some exorbitant amount and told me that they actually billed you according to the amount of shrimp eaten.

I kidded him about that and told him that I was bringing a sign to the reception that I would hold up if they ran out of shrimp on the buffet table. The sign would read, "More Shrimp." He laughed. I did bring the sign and in between a time when they were replenishing the



shrimp, I made sure I got his attention and I held up the sign quickly and then threw it into a nearby closet. He still laughed, but you can bet we did not run out of shrimp that night.

At the wedding Jesus attends in the story today, his own mother comes up to him with a sign that says, "More Wine." It would have been an extreme embarrassment in Jesus' day for the family throwing the party to run out of wine. Even though the folks were poor, they would do anything to provide plenty of wine for the wedding.

The way this usually happened was that extended family members would bring wine from their own homes and offer it in a collective way to assure that there was plenty. To run out not only meant that dad was out of money, but that dad did not have very good friends.

I am reminded of that old story of the village that was famous for its wine. Each family had their own vineyard and their own private vintage of wine. The time came for the annual big wine festival and a local official had the wild idea of creating a new taste of wine by asking everyone to come late at night and privately pour a bottle of their best wine into a large vat so that the result would be a collection of all the tastes. Each family brought in a bottle concealed in a bag so that no one could see just what vintage it was. They went into a room one by one and poured the contents of their bottle into a deep dark vat.

When the big day came, the official proudly gathered the people together and opened the spout at the bottom of the large vat. The towns-people gasped as they looked what came out into his waiting goblet. It was water.

Evidentially, each of the villagers did not want to share their special wine, thinking it would make no difference if they simply poured into the large vat a wine bottle that contained only water. After all, there were so many villagers and such a rich taste from the many wines that their little "lie" would be diluted by the power of the many other wines.

I guess you might say that this was the reverse of the story of Jesus turning the water into wine. This was the day that a group of selfish people turned wine into water.

Much can be said of this story from the gospel of John that is called a "sign" by the writer, but one thing for sure is that what we do or do not do makes a difference in the change that will or will not happen. According to the customs of the day, it seems that some of the extended family members and friends thought they their non-contribution would not make a difference so together they discover that the wine ran out.

The author of John does not call this water to wine event a miracle. He portrays it as a "sign." A sign points to something beyond itself. To ask the modern day question of "How did Jesus do this...what chemical reaction happened that made water into wine?" is to ask the wrong question. The question to be asked of a sign is the "who and why," not the "how and what."



One person put the distinction this way: The sign at the end of your street is red and painted with reflective paint. It measures a certain length and width and it has a definite shape, but none of that really matters. What matters is not the sign, what it is made of, or its shape. What matters is that you stop.

What matters in this story is not that Jesus does what some might think to be magic trick. What is important is that the story points beyond the reality that the party gets to go on because there is more shrimp and more wine.

The modern question may be, “How did he do that?” The ancient concern was “why” did he do that and who is it who is doing it?

The “why” is that Jesus is offering those who will pay attention a chance to be a part of the change they want to happen. These wedding goers were all longing for things to be different in their sterile religion and in their lives. They all longed for God to send something or someone into their poverty and their barrenness. The “who” part of the story is that the one who helps the party go on is the one whose ways if followed will change the world.

It was Gandhi who said, “Be the change you want in the world.” Martin Luther King Jr, whose life we remember at this time said, “Change does not roll on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle.”

In light of this, I remember another sign. This one comes from my childhood in Biloxi, Mississippi. The sign was the rectangular white sign with black letters that I failed to see above the water fountain in the department store. I drank my water and only then did I look up and see the sign that said, “Colored.” I glanced down the hall and saw another sign... “White Only.”

I wrote a poem that ended up in my first book that I entitled “Colored Water”

“Colored” read the sign above the fountain whose  
Water I had drunk.  
Would I be sick from drinking “colored” water?  
For I was a “white only,”  
Though but a child.  
I asked a big person,  
But my mistaken drink was washed away with  
Words.  
So I waited to see if I would turn ill,  
or perhaps “colored,”  
for no one would say.  
There was only laughter at my childish question,  
And the strange word “nigger” tossed about like a  
Toy-  
Now I am a “big person with no signs to read above



fountains.  
And my children laugh when I tell them the colored  
water story.  
For they do not understand how water could  
make people sick.

Signs point to something bigger than the sign. The sign above that water fountain of my childhood pointed to a deep sickness in our culture that Martin Luther King stood against. He died in part because of that sign. Real “signs,” if heeded, often require a change of direction and even sacrifice.

After I grew up, I started a process of questioning that child-hood sign. I had to decide if I was going to be part of the change I wanted. Other people with more courage than me helped us make that change happen.

This story of Jesus changing water into wine can be a sign to remind us of a call for change now. What change needs to happen in your life and in your world? I discovered another poem this week entitled “An Autobiography in Five Short Chapters.” The poem is a kind of parable about change and why we resist it.

A POETIC INTERLUDE:  
AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN FIVE SHORT CHAPTERS

by Portia Nelson

I

I walk, down the street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I fall in

I am lost.... I am helpless

It isn't my fault.

It takes forever to find a way out.

II

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.



I pretend I don't see it.

I fall in again

I can't believe I am in the same place but, it isn't my fault.

It still takes a long time to get out.

III

I walk down the same street

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I see it there.'

I still fall in.... it's a habit, my eyes are open.

I know where I am.

It is my fault.

I get out immediately.

IV

I walk down the same street.

There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.

I walk around it.

V

I walk down another street.

This poem reminds us that we offer all sorts of reasons or excuses for not changing or making things change, such as "I am helpless," "It's not my fault," or "I pretend it is not so." I remember those excuses being offered in the early days of the civil rights struggle. Thank God some people decided to be the change they wanted in the world.

I saw a short video this week on You Tube with this same title, "Be the Change You Want." It portrays a busy city street in a crowded town. A large tree has fallen across the path of the hectic traffic. People are blowing horns and screaming. A police car is there, but the officers seem to be waiting on someone else to come.



Individuals are yelling at each other or at some unknown, unseen presence that they seem to blame. Then the camera focuses on a young boy sitting on a school bus that is caught in the traffic jam. It starts to pour down rain. The child looks at everyone screaming, at the policemen who are just sitting in their car, and then he looks at the massive tree across the road.

Suddenly you see the boy walk off the school bus, take off his back pack, and put both hands on the downed tree. He starts to push as if he is attempting to roll the tree out of the way. People look at him as he leans against the tree with the water now pouring from his rain drenched head. Some of them laugh at his vain attempt.

Then a person who is sitting on a motor-scooter takes off his helmet, drops it in a puddle beside the scooter, walks over and stands beside the boy and starts to push. Then another person comes and another. The next scene is of the traffic again moving, one of the policemen who has gone to sleep awakens to see that the tree is gone. People are walking away from the scene wet, but laughing and giving each other high-fives. One solitary person is standing beside the young boy and helps him put his book bag back on.

Teddy Roosevelt once said, “Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.” Albert Einstein responded to a person who asked him how the world could change for the better; “All meaningful and lasting change starts first in your imagination and then works its way out. Imagination is more important than knowledge.”

Imagine just now what needs to change in your life. Imagine what needs changing in our church, in our community, in our world. Imagine...that water could become wine if we quit withholding our part in the change. Those villagers thought their small non-participation by not sharing their own wine would make no difference, but they managed to turn wine into water by not participating in the change that could be.

On this day that the United Methodist Church calls us to celebrate the diversity of our human relations, can we make the change to quit listening to the polarizing voices of the talking heads who scream at each other from the divide of liberal and conservative? Can we change our limiting filters that see Muslims or immigrants or certain people who are different from us as a mass of look-a-like-think-a-like people.

I never want to forget that I thought I might get sick by drinking from a fountain because of the sign above that fountain. I want to embrace the change that can come about from paying attention to voices that tell me, “This shall be a sign unto you; you shall find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger”...and to that story that says, “This was the first sign that Jesus did...at Cana of Galilee when he changed the water into wine.” It was a sign to tell the world that change was coming if enough people decided to be the change they wanted.

Jesus tells those who will listen in this sign story, “Take some empty vessels and let’s see what we can do.” I know that if I am going to make some changes, I will have to empty some stuff



from my life. Jesus then takes that emptiness and makes something new for people to take in so that they can celebrate the change that can come. For change in us and change in our society, some things we hold to will have to be emptied or let go of.

So I leave with you his mother's words to those at the party when she says about her boy, "Do whatever he says."

Jesus came not to start a religion to offer a "way." When he changed water into wine that day long ago it was not so that someone could analyze the new wine to see "what" happened. It was not so that a forensic team could be brought in to examine "how" he did it. The "change" that day was about us not about the wine. The good news of the day was not that you could not go to a store and buy your own "water to wine" kit to impress people at parties.

The good new was and is that the possibility for change is now made more potent if we want to follow the "way" of this changer of the world. The water to wine event is a sign pointing to something bigger and beyond. It points to us. With the help of the one who can take some of our emptiness and offer us something beyond our present reality, we can be the change we want.