

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: John 2:1-12

Sermon Title: "Wants, Wishes, and Needs Fulfilled"

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Jascha Heifetz was a violinist in the 1900s, known the world round. He is listed as one of the greatest violinist that the classical music world has ever seen. Heifetz was known as a tornado when playing his violin, because he played so rapidly. During one tour, Heifetz was collaborating with a pianist, Emanuel Bay, as a duet. After playing one concert hall Bay asked Heifetz to drop the tempo down a bit for the next performance. Bay said, "I am almost faking it, playing this piece. We have to play slower." During the next performance, Heifetz did not slow the tempo. He played even faster, like the tornado he was.

Each musician had a need they wanted to fulfill. Emanuel Bay needed the time to play each piece with control and even pace. Jascha Heifetz needed to show off his abilities, and prove he was the greatest violinist alive.

In the story about the wedding in Cana, there are three different needs that arise from three different people. There is the couple who got married in Cana,

who need their wedding to go without a hitch. Weddings back in Jesus' time didn't involve a service in a church that lasts 30 minutes to an hour, followed by a reception dinner in some large room. Weddings back then lasted for a week, with guests coming and going every day.¹ It was an open house with much food and drink consumed during the seven-day period. It was the responsibility of the bridegroom to make sure there were plenty of victuals for everybody. Weddings usually caused a great financial strain on the couple, but it was all a part of getting married. Their families would take care of them.

So this particular couple is feeding their guests with rich food and delicious beverages. Everybody is having a grand time. But then tragedy strikes. Somebody discovers that the wine is running out. This is the main beverage the guests are drinking, and there is none left.² Not only do the guests have nothing to drink, they also have nothing to bring them joy to celebrate the married couple's happy week. You see, according to Jewish customs wine is a symbol of joy and thanksgiving. The presence of wine means there is prosperity, there is festivity, there is gladness and hope. When the prophets of the Old Testament wrote about the destruction of Jerusalem, they

¹ Colin G. Kruse, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: John*, 93.

² Wine may have been the only beverage available to guests. Water was used for ritual cleanings, and possibly for drinking as well.

lamented that the vineyards would not be able to produce grapes any more. With the grapes gone, the wine would be gone, and their joy and hope would be gone too. Wine was very important for the customs and culture of the Jewish people.

(Now, as a quick side note, wine back in Jesus' time was not as strong as it is today. Wine was usually mixed with copious amounts of water to dilute it. A jug could contain one part wine and five parts water. If someone drank too much, it was a sign of sin, not of joy and thanksgiving to God. If a person could not enjoy the harvest of grapes, he was humiliated by those around him.)

We go back to the tragedy in Cana. The wine is gone, and so the joy at the wedding feast is gone. This is a great embarrassment to the couple with guests still present. Something has to be done, or else the wedding celebration will fall apart, and the couple will lose face as the guests leave in disappointment.

There is Mother Mary who has a need during this wedding in Cana. Jesus' mother is present at the wedding, because she probably could be the coordinator of it. According to the Coptic Christian tradition, Mary is a sister of the bridegroom's mother. As a gift to the couple, she becomes the person in charge to make sure everything runs smoothly for an

entire week.³ She keeps the food supply at a high level, and she makes sure the jugs of wine do not diminish. She has all the skills a respectful and responsible mother would have.

For some reason, however, the wine jugs have gone dry. Somehow Mary does not anticipate that the drink would run out. And the wedding is still going on strongly! She becomes frantic and must find a solution to the problem. She approaches her son, Jesus himself, and tells him about the predicament they are facing.

This brings us to the third need at the wedding feast, the need that which comes from Jesus. Because Mary is a guest at the wedding, her Son would naturally be invited. Jesus already has some disciples with him, so he brings them along. It's okay – guests have been coming and going for days. Jesus only hopes to celebrate this happy occasion with the couple; he isn't there to heal or teach or perform a miracle or two. But then the wine runs out, and his mother approaches him with the problem. Jesus calls his mother *Woman* out of respect, not out of annoyance. It is just as respectful to call her *Woman* as it is for us to say *Ma'am*. Jesus says, "What does your concern have to do with me? My hour has not

³ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John: Volume 1*, 80-81.

come yet.”⁴ What hour is Jesus talking about? The hour of this death on a cross? His hour to fully reveal to everyone that he is Christ the Lord? Jesus has a need during this wedding at Cana, just as the newlyweds and Mother Mary have, and Jesus’ need is to fulfill the will of God the Father. Because Jesus Christ is God, he will do nothing outside of what God the Father would do. This should make perfect sense. Throughout John’s Gospel Jesus will constantly remind us that his will is to do the will of God the Father. It is his food. It is his sole purpose for coming to earth in human form. Now is not the time to perform miracles just to perform them. Now is not the time to solve a problem for a newly-married couple just so that they may save face. What does all of this have to do with Jesus, unless it is God the Father’s will to save their wedding celebration?

We all have needs. Each of our needs is unique and important to us. A baby has the need to be held and fed and have diapers changed in a timely manner. A child’s need is to play and play, even in the late hours of night. An adult’s needs are to have enough money for every bill and medical emergency and, of course, to have a little bit more money for some fun stuff. We all have needs, and yet we tend to confuse

⁴ John 2:4.

needs with wants. We tend to think our wants are the same as our needs. My daughter says to me, “I *need* a cell phone.” She doesn’t have one right now, and she doesn’t need one right now. Even if she had a cell phone, would she die if it suddenly vanished? Will her eternal existence be at stake, if she never texts her friends? No. Nobody *needs* a cell phone. We want one, but it is not a need. My son says, “I *need* another Wii videogame.” The Wii is really fun to play – you can catch me playing it on any given day. But it is not a need. It is only a want that we can take or leave.

What we need are water and food, because without them we will die. We need companionship and love, people who care about us and people to care for. We need a place to stay for protection, although the size of our homes is up for debate. We need God, and the salvation we receive through Jesus Christ. And because we need God, we need to fulfill the will of God the Father, just as Jesus the Son once did. We need to act on our faith, causing it to grow wider and deeper, causing our love to flow more freely toward others.

In our story about an obscure town called Cana, there are three different people needing three different things, and the One who responds to the entire situation unselfishly is Jesus himself. We discover

that it is the will of God the Father to relieve the spirit of a troubled mother, who wants to see the wedding celebration go without a hitch. It is God's will to give newlyweds their happy moment amid guests who are thrilled that they have found each other, and want to stay together until death separates them. Jesus deals with the situation. He will perform the miracle, and change water into wine. The wine will flow, and so will the joy and hope of everybody.

Jesus takes care of our needs. He even takes care of our wants, our wishes. It is the wish of a mother that her children grow up with a good education and a good family for themselves, and with much prayer the Lord hears and shapes her children so they may live their lives for God. A grandmother wishes for her grandchildren to be health and happy, and the Lord gives them reasons to smile and be grateful. It is the wish of everybody to get a good job, or even to find a job at all, and Jesus Christ stands with that person in making it happen. It is the wish of anybody to struggle through a disease and conquer it, and Jesus Christ moves a person through any malady in the effort to make the person whole through and through. It is the wish for all of us to be loved, and Jesus Christ is always available to make that wish a reality, calling us by name, filling us with the love of the Father, forgiving our sin, and giving us new life even in the

morning of every day.

And as we bear witness to the fact that Jesus is caring for us, fulfilling wishes and wants as well as needs, we realize that we need to fulfill the will of God the Father with our lives. We don't just sit back and accept all the Lord is doing for us – we discover that it is our need to do as Jesus did to the glory of God.

When Jesus turned that water into wine, and the master servant of the wedding feast declared it to be the best wine they had had at the feast, Jesus revealed himself to those around him as the Savior who does what God would do. The servants at the wedding saw the whole thing take place – a jug full of clear liquid turning a shade of red – and they saw Jesus Christ as Someone special, Someone who takes care of his people as God does. We don't read about Mother Mary's response to the changing of the water, but we can be sure that she knew. She knew that Jesus would accomplish God's will, no matter if he was at a wedding in a small town or in the temple in the city of Jerusalem. Luke tells us in his Gospel that Mary treasured all things in her heart, when Jesus was born in a home for farm animals. The shepherds had come to pay homage to the newborn Savior, and she knew. She had felt it inside her body, as the Baby grew. She saw it when he was born, and even 12 years later

when Jesus was left behind at the temple, and Mary and Joseph had no clue where he was.⁵ Mary knew, and she continued to treasure spiritual matters in her heart. She knew her Son, God the Son, would fix the mess that arose in Cana, and in so doing accomplish God's will.

Jesus' first, great miracle inspires us to perform miracles for God. Jesus inspires us to think a little less of ourselves, and a little more about God, and what the Father is doing in the world. And when we get a glimpse of what God is doing, we get on aboard with it, and we act as Jesus acted. We fulfill people's wishes, wants, and needs. We restore the joy in their hearts by showing the love of God, by telling them about the love of God. We give them hope, we give them inspiration, and we give them a chance to live again with gratitude.

The celebration goes on. The feast of God's rich blessings continues to flow without interruption.

⁵ Cf. Luke 2:41-50.

