

“Celebrate”

Isaiah 62:1-5, John 2:1-11, 11:15

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William Sloane Coffin said, “It is blasphemous for us to turn the wine of life into water. Life is to be celebrated. In all its God-given wholeness it is to be enjoyed.”

How do you celebrate life? When you complete a task, accomplish something, create something, how do you resist the urge to dive into the next thing so you can joyfully celebrate? The prophet Isaiah proclaims that God is rejoicing over you. God rejoices over you being you. God desires for you to rejoice, for you to sit on a porch, or in a boat, in your favorite place, with your favorite beverage, soaking in the wonder of the cosmos, imagining God rejoicing over you. What hinders you from joyful celebrations? Perhaps a quest for money, or an aspiration that everything about your home is organized and clean, or a craving to change something about yourself, or a sense of obligation that you need to do all sorts of things for all sorts of people, or a zealous work ethic to always do more, or a desire to please people. Jesus said, **John 11:15 MSG “I’ve told you these things for a purpose: that my joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature.”**

Jesus joined the celebrations of life. Jesus turned water into wine to make the celebration more festive. **John 2:1-11 NLT “The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus’ mother told him, “They have no more wine.” “Dear woman, that’s not our problem,” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.” But his mother told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told the servants, “Fill the jars with water.” When the jars had been filled, Jesus said, “Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies.” So the servants followed his instructions. When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. “A host always serves the best wine first,” he said. “Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!” This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”**

William Sloane Coffin said, “Jesus first visits people not in their sorrow, but in their joy... What does this say to gloomy Christians? Mind you, I’m not suggesting that all, or even most, of the sourpusses in the world are to be found in the churches. But there are an awful lot who seem to forget that if only one tenth of what we Christians believe were true, we still ought to be ten times as excited as we are.”

What is the greater miracle: turning the water into wine or turning gloomy people into joyful people? It is a story of grace. The six water jars were used for Jewish rites of purification. The water was used for washing hands and utensils, meeting the need for constant cleanliness as the law required. The number six symbolizes incompleteness. God’s grace transforms us making us pure and complete. Even if one was able to do all the works of the law, which no one can, they still would be incomplete, for they would be lacking joy. The wine was enjoyed freely by all the guests. Most of them, perhaps even the bride and groom, did not know the source of the wine. God freely offers grace, joy, purity, completeness to all.

It was the custom at that time for a marriage feast to last one week. New guests would arrive daily. The abundant food, wine, music, and fellowship was a sign pointing to the restoration of Israel, the transformation of each individual, and the joyful celebration of the messianic banquet in heaven. The wine is a sign that one day we will celebrate our eternal resurrection life with God, each other, and with all we love in our glorious home. The prophet Isaiah proclaimed, **Isaiah 62:1-5 NLT “Because I love Zion, I will not keep still. Because my heart yearns for Jerusalem, I cannot remain silent. I will not stop praying for her until her righteousness shines like the dawn, and her salvation blazes like a burning torch. The nations will see your righteousness. World leaders will be blinded by your glory. And you will be given a new name by the Lord’s own mouth. The Lord will hold you in God’s hand for all to see—a splendid crown in the hand of God. Never again will you be called “The Forsaken City” or “The Desolate Land.” Your new name will be “The City of God’s Delight” and “The Bride of God,” for the Lord delights in you and will claim you**

as his bride. Your children will commit themselves to you, O Jerusalem, just as a young man commits himself to his bride. Then God will rejoice over you as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride.

God delights in you. God rejoices over you. A marriage festival with abundant wine gives us a small foretaste of the joys Jesus wants us to savor, and a glimpse of the glory of heaven. Running out of wine would be a huge oversight, be socially embarrassing, bring shame on the family, would disperse the guests and halt the celebration. Jesus provides an extraordinary amount of wine 120 to 180 gallons. God's grace and joy is extravagantly abundant for beyond what we can imagine.

In the gospel of John, Jesus' first miracle is to overcome monotonous life with joyful celebration. The call of the disciples is to be barriers of God's grace to everyone. God's grace is everywhere and abundant, yet the servants filled the jars with water and took the wine to the guests. The wine was freely offered to everyone. Most of the guests were oblivious to the source of the wine. We are to be gracious to everyone, to offer God's grace to everyone. We are to be gracious even to those who are oblivious of God.

The disciples saw Jesus turn water into wine. They realized that Jesus transforms people. They perceived that their call was to share God's transforming grace with others. They joined the joyful celebration which completed their call to discipleship.

The new wine that Jesus provides will never run out. It is a new creation. The old creation with its burden of sin is transformed. Grace is a new dimension that will glorify all. Jesus is bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth, the inauguration of a whole new celebration. Jesus revealed that all which wine and wedding signified spiritually and culturally for the Jewish people is now freely flowing from Jesus. We are to join the joyful celebration.

Wendell Berry said, "Whoever really has considered the lilies of the field or the birds of the air and pondered the improbability of their existence will hardly balk at the turning of water into wine which was, after all, a very small miracle. We forget the greater and still continuing miracle by which water with soil and sunlight is turned into grapes."

John Buchanan says, the wine is "a sign surely of abundance, extravagance. John wants us to know that Jesus is the Son of God, the Word made flesh; that when we look at Jesus and watch what he does, we are seeing something of the reality of God. And apparently the first thing John wants us to know is that God, the Ground of all being, is like that, extravagant, abundant. John wants us to open our eyes and see the extravagant abundance of things all around us—of beauty, of the world's fertility, of the goodness of creation, flowers and stars and moon and sparkling expanses of snow, of newborn babies, of human compassion and caring, of human love. And surely the wedding story is a sign that God says yes to human joy, that God has created us for reunions and celebrations and laughter. Why would this Son of God, this Word of God made flesh, not begin his work in the temple or the synagogue with a solemn sermon, but at a party, turning water into wine, if it was not a sign of a God who wants us to enjoy our lives, to live fully, to love the gift of life itself?"

A shortage of a main wedding ingredient becomes an overflowing abundance in the blink of an eye. God is abundant. Jesus provided the equivalent of 1,000 bottles of wine which is extravagant and excessive like God's grace. God's abundance, joy, and grace is provided whether we have knowledge of it or not. Regardless of who we are, what we have done, failed to do or even what we think; God's abundant grace overflows transforming our lives, transforming the world, into whole, complete joy. We are called to join the party, to savor grace, to be gracious to each other and share God's grace.

Your joyful celebrations are signs of what is to come and ought to be. Your joyful celebrations are what God intends for the human family. People eating and drinking together, loving the gift of life, loving being together. Jesus is always at every joyful celebration for Jesus provides the joy. God delights in you and rejoices over you. God delights in and rejoices over all of us. Amen