

The Gospel of John  
Lesson 4 – John 2:1-12  
**Bringing Abundance**

This portion of John deals with the first of Jesus' seven "signs." Before we unpack the story of the wedding at Cana, we will examine the use of "sign(s)" in John. The Gospel of John does not use the word miracle. Instead, the book uses the word "sign" to describe out of the ordinary occurrences. What we need to understand is that the "sign" in John is not synonymous with miracle. Sign instead signifies that there is something specific that the "sign" is intending to confirm, corroborate, or authenticate. In this Gospel the "signs" are intended to prove that Jesus is who he and his followers believe that he is. Those who are skeptical of Jesus ask for "signs" from Jesus so as to prove his identity, and in response Jesus offers "signs", though some people cannot see them as such.

The story outline is relatively simple. There is a wedding. Jesus' mother (notice Jesus' mother is never referred to as Mary in the Gospel of John...just as his mother) appears to have a significant role in the wedding, hence her overseeing the wine supply. The wine is running low (a very bad thing for a wedding celebration that is supposed to last for a week). Mary asks Jesus to remedy the situation. Jesus says some cryptic words but ends up providing the "best" wine in an unusual manner. Jesus then travels to his home base accompanied by his family and friends.

**The wine running out:** This incident can be seen on two levels. The first level is that of a party that needs more wine. The second level is symbolic, where Jesus sees a connection between the lack of party wine and Israel's lack of the abundance of life that Israel is to have and share with the world. This is based in the concept that Israel is God's vine/vineyard that is to be producing fruit in abundance (Isaiah 5:1). Unfortunately, as the prophets often pointed out, the vine was often unfruitful (Isaiah 3:14), which would be the case in this story.

**Jesus and his mother:** This interaction operates on the same two levels. The first level is that Mary expected her eldest child to do his duty and follow her instructions. Jesus does so, but not without some commentary. The commentary is offered because Jesus sees the symbolic nature of what has happened. This understanding of the symbolism leads to his response, "Woman, what concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come." These words suggest 1) that Jesus is respectful of his mother...the word "woman" means something like "my lady" and not "hey woman." 2) but they also show that while Jesus understands that his calling is to make Israel/the world abundant with life once again, the time is not yet come for this to happen so neither he nor his mother have this responsibility at this moment.

**The Jars of water/wine:** The water in the jars was used for ritual purification and washing as commanded by Torah. The washing would make one ritually pure. By Jesus turning that ritual purification water into wine Jesus is demonstrating that he is the Messiah (hence the concept of sign) who will bring about a new abundance as spoken by the prophets (Amos 9:13-14; Hosea 14:7; Jeremiah 31:12). Finally, this is the best wine because it is a symbol of the coming messianic age.

**The journey to Capernaum:** The Gospel of John like the other Gospels has no problem with Jesus having siblings.

**Questions:**

1. How have you understood this wedding at Cana story?
2. What do you think of the stories operating on two levels?
3. What are your thoughts about Jesus having not only disciples but siblings?