

Sitting in the Gap Study Guide – January 20, 2019

[John 2:1-11](#)

(Click on scripture above to link directly to each passage in the *NRSV* on [biblegateway.com](#).)

Suggested Study / Prep

1. Read the passage(s) in several different translations and/or paraphrases (e.g. *NRSV* and *The Message*)
2. Read the provided commentary(s) below
3. Visit and explore some of the additional resources links (and/or explore your own commentaries, resources, etc)
4. Reflect on the provided questions
5. Generate your own questions and “wonderings”

Commentary on John 2:1-11 (From *Homiletics*; “The Hangover: Jesus Edition”, January 20, 2013)

John 2:1-11 narrate the rather odd and uniquely Johannine account of Jesus' miracle of changing water into wine. A number of details within this account have attracted the attention of commentators. This attention begins as early as verse 1, where the text recounts a wedding in Cana "on the third day." The explanation of the day as "the third" has perplexed numerous commentators. In the context of John's gospel up to this point, there seems to have been at least four days that have already passed given the series of events that happen on "the next day" (1:29, 1:35, 1:43). Given this count, the wedding would be occurring on at least the fifth day. Thus, calendrical time seems to have shifted here. This oddity has thus led some thinkers to propose various connections to the tradition of Jesus' being raised on the third day, but this connection seems unlikely. John's account of time at Jesus' first resurrection appearance is given only in terms of the day of the week, not in connection to the amount of time that had passed since his death (20:1, that is, "the first day of the week" rather than "three days later"). Thus, the reference to the "third day" in 2:1 may simply be a convention for showing the progression of narrative time, or it may even be a reference to "the day after tomorrow," that is, two days after the calling of Philip and Nathanael.

The "third day" issue is not the only matter of interest in verse 1. The introduction of Cana is also intriguing. John is the only gospel to mention Cana, and the gospel situates not only this event but also the healing of the official's son (4:46-54) in this locale. Likewise, when Nathanael is reintroduced in 21:2, he is said to be from Cana.

The introduction of Jesus' mother is also noteworthy. John is alone among the gospels in not naming Jesus' mother "Mary." Nonetheless, the mother's role in the gospel is not unimportant, as her presence bookends Jesus' ministry. After this appearance at the wedding, the mother of Jesus will not show up again until she stands by Jesus' cross at his crucifixion and is placed into the care of the disciple whom Jesus loved (19:25-27). In this episode in Cana, however, one wonders if Jesus' brothers should also be imagined to be accompanying his mother. Though his mother and the disciples are mentioned in 2:1-2, when the scene changes in 2:12, the reader is informed that Jesus goes back to Capernaum not only with his mother and disciples, but also with his brothers. Thus, it seems possible that the brothers had at one point been included in some version of this story.

After the matters of introduction in verses 1 and 2, verse 3 sets the stage for the drama which follows as Jesus' mother informs Jesus that "they have no wine." Though it can sound a bit blunt to modern ears, Jesus' response is perhaps not all that bizarre: "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?" In fact, the careful reader may be wondering the same thing. If the wedding were for a relative of Jesus' mother who may have herself incurred some level of shame as a result of the missing wine, then her concern is warranted. Likewise, were Jesus himself a close relative of the newlyweds, then his mother's act of bringing the situation to his attention may also be understandable. However, given that the story does not provide even the slightest hint that this is the case, the reason for Jesus' mother's act of calling the lack of wine to Jesus' attention is inscrutable.

The oddities of the story only continue. Despite Jesus' rather dismissive response to his mother in verse 4, her instructions to the servants in verse 5 suggest that she has simply ignored her son's rebuke. In light of the story that unfolds, her word to the servants in verse 5 turns out to be a fitting one. Like his mother, Jesus also appears not to have taken his own statement in verse 4 too seriously. Rather, he instructs the servants to fill stone jars with water, draw some out, and present it to the steward (vv. 7-8). At this point, John leaves his readers as much in the dark as the characters in the story. Like the servants, the reader does not know when or how Jesus performs the transformative miracle, but again like the servants, the reader finds out about the miracle's consequences as the steward tastes "the water that had become wine." The reader then has some level of identification with the servants who are "in the know" and is contrasted with the steward who is ignorant of the wine's origin. This contrast between knowing and not knowing continues throughout the book of John, and like the story here, the larger context of the gospel also invites the reader to be "in the know," in contrast to other characters who are not privy to such inside knowledge.

The close of this story in verse 11 raises almost as many questions as the pericope's introduction. The numbering of this sign as the "first" of Jesus' signs leads the reader to expect a similar enumeration to follow. However, the only other sign that is numbered is the healing of the official's son (4:54), which is called the second of Jesus' signs, even though the intervening episode in which Jesus prophetically announces the Samaritan woman's marital status (4:17-19) could also seem to be a good candidate for sign status. Likewise, the announcement in 2:23 that many believed in Jesus due to his signs suggests that other signs intervened between the "first" and the "second." After the "second" sign in 4:54, the convention of enumeration is dropped entirely.

Finally, verse 11 provides an odd closing to this story in its announcement that Jesus' actions at the wedding had the effect of revealing his glory. Although Jesus has, in a sense, revealed his glory with this sign, in the larger context of the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' glory will not be fully revealed until after the events of his crucifixion and resurrection. Indeed, his prayer in 17:5 seems to suggest that whatever earthly glory Jesus has received, it is not comparable to the glory from which he has come and to which he is returning. Thus, 2:11 ironically foreshadows Jesus' future glory with this revelation of his glory in the sign at Cana.

Additional Resources

- [The Text this Week](#) – a huge archive of commentaries, blogs, sermons, etc. Note – this site collects resources related to ALL of the lectionary texts for a given week...not all will relate to the passage(s) being studied, but many will. You will have to sift!
- Check out other commentaries available for these texts (and others!) at [WorkingPreacher.org](#).

Reflection Questions on John 2:1-11

1. Do you believe in miracles? Do you believe that Jesus literally turned water into wine? If so, how do you imagine that it happened? What would people have seen if they were watching the events unfold? If you do not, how do you make sense of this story? Why would such a story be told?
2. This story occurs only in the Gospel of John, the latest of the gospels to be written according to scholars. In fact, John is the only gospel to even mention Cana. Why do you think such a notable story from the life of Jesus would be missing from the accounts of Jesus' life and ministry in the other gospels? Does this story have particular bearing on the gospel as uniquely seen through John's eyes? How do you understand the variances in gospel accounts – generally speaking?
3. From Lindsey Trozzo (*workingpreacher.org*, 1/20/2016): *As I considered this passage where Jesus famously changes water into wine, it struck me that we could similarly read the Bible as wine-drinkers. Reading the Bible with wine in mind means paying attention to the subtleties and the layers as we read. It means carrying with us new categories and questions to facilitate a fresh experience of the story. I'd like to offer three "tasting notes" to pay attention to as we encounter John's story of Jesus' first sign:*
 - *What cultural expectations surrounding hospitality sit in the background of this story, and what might that tell us about Jesus' mission?*
 - *What other texts might the audience think of when encountering this story, and how might that enhance our understanding of the story's meaning?*
 - *What power dynamics, social structures, and expectations are subverted by the story, and how might that challenge us to consider our own ways of being in the world?*

What questions do you have?

What do you "wonder" about when reading these passages?