



ST ALBANS

Magic at Cana

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Whenever I hear the story of Jesus at the wedding feast in Cana, I think of the Johnny Cash song. Do you know it? “He Turned the Water into Wine” In the late 60s Johnny and his wife June Carter visited the Holy Land. On his album Live at San Quentin, he introduces the song with a little story. Let’s listen. (1:00-1:45)

He turned the water into wine
he turned the water into wine
In the little Cana town the word went all around that
He turned the water into wine

“If I ever had an inspiration, I had one then from seeing what I had just seen and heard.”

Can we picture ourselves standing near the cisterns? Can we hear the water? Why was Johnny Cash so inspired by what he saw at Cana? PAUSE. What’s inspiring about this story? We could go in so many different directions. But this morning, I want to focus on just one: magic. This story is magical.

Now what do I mean? Oxford defines magic as “the power of apparently influencing the course of events by using mysterious or supernatural forces.” So the obvious one here is that Jesus’ miracle is indeed magical. Objectively, Jesus is definitely influencing the course of events at the wedding by using mysterious or supernatural forces. There was water, now there’s wine.

In our society we tend to look down on magic. We confine it to Las Vegas or Netflix shows. It’s all illusionism. How did the magician trick us? It’s not real. It’s all for entertainment. It’s a little bit corny.

It’s tempting to put Jesus’ miracle into this category. It can’t be true. Water into wine. But when we do this, we miss the point. We miss the richness of the story. We



ST ALBANS

miss the true magic. So why was Johnny Cash so inspired by his time in the little town of Cana? Surely he wasn't this moved because of a cheesy party trick? No, I'm sure that it was about more than that.

Well he walked upon the Sea of Galilee
He walked upon the Sea of Galilee
Shouted far and wide he calmed the raging tide and
Walked upon the Sea of Galilee

He turned the water into wine he did my lord now
He turned the water into wine
In the little Cana town, the word went all around that
He turned the water into wine

Only the gospel of John includes the story of the wedding at Cana. We hear it only once every three years in our church lectionary. It's the first of seven miracles, John calls them "signs", that Jesus performs in this gospel. What are the others? If you were here in person I'd quiz you. The other six signs are: the healing of the royal official's son; the healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda; the feeding of the five-thousand; the walking on water; the healing of the man born blind, and; the raising of Lazarus.

So what's different about this first miracle? Unlike the very serious healings, feeding, walking and raising, turning water into wine can seem a little frivolous, no?¹ The signs are meant to convince us that Jesus is divine. That Jesus is God incarnate. That Jesus is the Messiah. Healing, feeding, walking on water, raising the dead, okay, yes, these are things that a god does. But turning water into wine? Really? Yes, really. God is a magical God. God is a God of abundance. Not only is the water turned into wine, but the point is made that it is of the highest quality. God shows up at a country wedding and provides delicious plentiful wine. Gallons and gallons of it.

¹ <https://www.workingpreacher.org/commentaries/revised-common-lectionary/second-sunday-after-epiphany-3/commentary-on-john-21-11-8>



ST ALBANS

God heals, God feeds, God walks on water, God raises the dead, but God also loves a good party. God loves and provides hospitality, friendship, bounty. Can we think back to when we used to go out for dinner, or just have friends over to share a pizza? There was laughter, warmth, companionship. It was magical. I think that now we're getting closer to why Johnny Cash was so inspired.

He fed the hungry multitude (didn't he brother)

He fed the hungry multitude

With a little bit of fish and bread

They said everyone was fed (5000)

He fed the hungry multitude

He turned the water into wine

(Didn't a carpenter from Nazareth)

He turned the water into wine

In the little Cana town, the word went all around that

He turned the water into wine

Now I'm going to go out on a limb here a little bit. I'm going to suggest that Johnny Cash was inspired by the magic of transformation. Maybe Johnny saw himself as the water transformed into wine. Johnny Cash's faith was one that developed in his adulthood. His faith inspired his life, his relationships and his art. How do we picture ourselves? As water? As wine? As some kind of in-between spritzer? What would it take for us to become fine wine?

To close, I'm going to take it one last step. What if Johnny saw himself as one who transforms? The irony in all of this is that despite the fact that this is such a magical story, we don't hear Jesus saying any magic words as he changes the water into wine. There's no spell, no incantation. Jesus' presence, his love, his care for others is what transformed the water. Our presence, our love, our care for others can transform lives, can transform unjust situations. Jesus tells us that he leaves us with his Holy Spirit. It lives in each one of us. He tells us to go out and heal and love. This is what he was talking about. Making water into wine. We can do it too.



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Amen.