

**Isaiah 62:1-5**  
**Psalm 36:5-10**  
**1 Corinthians 12:1-11**  
**John 2:1-11**

Sermon for 1/16/2022

## THE NEW WINE

By Rev. Dr. Don Algeo

Summary: The old has passed away.

The first time I ever tasted homemade wine was many years ago, when I was working in the Forest Service in Oregon. One of the supervisors was an older fellow – seemed that way at the time, anyway – and it was a point of considerable pride with him that he and his wife made their own wine. They used to get grapes from a neighbor, and for a certain time every summer, they brought big bottles and kettles into the kitchen, along with a device for inserting corks into bottles, and for a few days every autumn he and his wife and all their kids – I think there were about eight of them – would turn their kitchen into a little winery. They'd bottle the wine up and give their friends a bottle for Christmas presents. I remember he used to pat himself on the back about how much money that saved them at Christmas.

Anyway, on one occasion, they had some of us young guys over to their house for a meal, and before we sat down to eat, he proudly brought out a couple of bottles of their wine, and poured us each a glass. I still remember holding it up to the light to examine it, then swishing it around in the glass and sniffing it the way I'd seen people do in the movies, then eagerly taking a big drink. And I practically spat it out. It was one of the worst things I'd ever tasted. It was like drinking Kool Aid mixed with gasoline.

But of course he was the host and I was the guest, so I had to make appreciative noises, and courageously drink the whole glass. And young fool that I was, I accepted a refill, and then another after that, and to be honest, after two or three

refills, I was pretty much able to get it down without wanting to gag. I don't remember how the meal went after that, but maybe that just means that the wine did what wine is supposed to do. He had in fact taken ordinary grape juice and turned it into wine. That seemed almost like a miracle to me at the time.

But here's the point. It wasn't a miracle, like the one we read about in our Gospel selection for this morning. My friend didn't turn water into wine; he turned grape juice into wine.

Perhaps a brief review of how grape juice turns into wine is in order. When you mix grape juice or any liquid that has natural sugar in it with yeast, the bacteria in the yeast start consuming the sugar, and, without being too graphic about it, as a byproduct of eating the sugar, these bacteria excrete ethyl alcohol, and that's what makes it intoxicating. (As an aside, that's why ordinary wine never has a very high alcoholic content: once there's a certain level of ethyl alcohol in the grape juice, it kills the yeast bacteria, and the whole process comes to a natural and inevitable halt.)

But here's the point. The original fluid has to have sugar in it. If you put the same yeast into plain water, all you'll ever have is yeasty tasting water, since there's nothing for the bacteria to consume. It's therefore literally impossible to turn water into wine.

And yet that's exactly what Jesus did: turned ordinary water into wine. He did something that had no possible earthly explanation.

And so the first thing that John wants us to see in this miracle is that Jesus brought something wholly new into God's creation. It is a miracle of transformation, taking what was old and transforming it into something new, something that never could have been before, but now that Jesus has come, something that changes everything.

Paul points to this understanding of what Christ's appearance in the world means to us when he wrote in his second letter to the Corinthians:

*So from now on we regard no one according to the flesh. Although we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. 17Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come! (2 Cor 5: 17)*

Paul's point is that Jesus did not simply rearrange the world, he completely changed the world; he didn't simply add something to the world, he gave it a new beginning. And that's clearly the meaning that John finds in this first miracle of Christ. When Jesus takes control of the wedding party, the party ceases to be simply another worldly wedding, it becomes a heavenly celebration. The water doesn't just become better water; it becomes something entirely different: it becomes wine.

And the symbolism of the wine itself tells us something enormously important about the nature of this transformation, of this new beginning. And surely that's the second thing John wants us to see in this miracle.

Throughout our Bible, wine is used again and again as a symbol of God's blessing:

Isaiah 25:6 prophesies that *“The LORD of hosts will prepare a lavish banquet for all peoples on this mountain; A banquet of aged wine, choice pieces with marrow, And refined, aged wine.”*

The author of Ecclesiastes tells us in Ecclesiastes 9:7: *“Go then, eat your bread in happiness and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already approved your works.”*

Over the years, we've established a tradition when we conclude one of our Bible Study segments of celebrating with something yummy to eat – this year, of course, we had the World's Best cheese – accompanied with a bottle or three of wine – and many here can testify to how the get-togethers become more animated and friendly as the glasses are refilled. That's just what wine does. We toast the new year with champagne, not with milk.

And so also, the wedding party in Cana would have remained a subdued and somber affair if Jesus had converted the water into milk; but he didn't, he converted it into wine, that lubricant of happy celebration. The wedding party wasn't simply changed, it was enlivened, it was invigorated, it was transformed into joyful milestone in the lives of all those in attendance.

And in the same way when Jesus enters into our life, whether it's the life of a community or a church or, most importantly, into the life of every individual, that life is injected with joy, given a new vibrant quality and a new living and delightful substance. “Behold, the new has come!”

In the very next chapter of John's Gospel, Jesus tells Nicodemus: *"Truly, truly, I tell you, unless one is **born** again he **cannot see** the Kingdom of God."* What that means is that until Jesus enters your life, you cannot even begin to experience the peace that passes all understanding, the abiding happiness of resting in God's love, the joy of your own salvation.

And the third reason John records this particular miracle for us is surely because of the nature of the occasion in which it occurred. It happened at a wedding,

A wedding is not a conclusion, it's a beginning, it's the foundation of a new life that stretches into the indefinite future. The author of the book of Genesis teaches us that: *24 For **this reason a man** will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.* A wedding is not just another step in the life of its participants; it's the creation of something altogether new, something with its own independent existence, with its own story and its own vitality, its own life. A wedding is the foundation of a family that would otherwise never come into being, the first chapter of a novel that never concludes.

The wine that Jesus provided to that wedding at Cana blessed the foundation of a new and lasting creation; and just so, the wine that Jesus provides to every life blesses the creation of something that stretches into the eternal future, ever growing, ever adapting, ever deepening. Unlike the earthly wine that offers a temporary glow, a passing merriment, the wine of Christ's blessing offers a nourishment for a richer and better life for each of us, now and forever.

And so our prayer for this morning, heavenly Father, is that you keep us ever mindful that our lives aren't simply improved, they're transformed when we are born again. Help us to experience the joy of that new life even in the midst of difficulties, and let that joy transform those circumstances. Grant us the peace of knowing that our new life is not just joyful, but endlessly so, an eternity spent in the company of your beloved son, in whose name we pray.