

You may or may not have paid much attention to the way in which each of the four gospel writers begin their accounts of the good news of God as exemplified in the birth, life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, God's only begotten Son, born of the Virgin Mary, Messiah, Lord, Savior, healer, friend, teacher, debate extraordinaire, mentor, miracle worker, faithful steward, and so much more, so let's take a quick look.

- Matthew begins his account with a genealogy and substantive birth narrative to connect Jesus with Jewish ancestors of the past. Most notable perhaps is David, for it was the prophets who declared that the Messiah would come from the line of David's house.
- Mark, who actually provides the first written account, begins his action-packed drama with the proclamation of John the Baptist that Jesus is coming, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me... I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (Mark 1:7-8) The account of Jesus' baptism follows and then we find Jesus alone in the wilderness for 40 days.
- Luke, much like Matthew, begins his account with a substantive birth narrative. Without Luke's added pieces of the birth narrative, we may not have the full picture we imagine and share at Christmas time each year.
- And then there is John. John begins with a poetic theological declaration, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." (John 1:1-3) This start seems to present a chronological series of events to follow, however that proves to be pretty far from the truth. The remainder of the first chapter is a quick summary account of how Jesus gets his ministry started by calling disciples all for what appears to be the purpose of setting up the first of many different wonders (miracles) in which Jesus will display his divine power and divine love. John's focus of the divinity of Jesus does not give in to chronology as Jesus' revelation is best just witnessed and shared. It's the meaning of the story John wants his readers to get.

We live in a pretty skeptical world, and it seems skepticism is on the rise, especially when it comes to reading stories like the one Nancy just read in John 2, Jesus turning water into wine. If Kathleen said it once she said it 100 times during VBS after the stories of Jesus' miracles were shared. The kids would ask with their head tilted to one side, "How did Jesus do that?" You may have thought that too when you heard the story. Kathleen's answer was, "It's a miracle." This answer is true. What Kathleen was getting at was that Jesus was not just some great magician with incredible magic tricks. Jesus wasn't and isn't in the business of deceiving or tricking the eye to get something by us. What Jesus did was an example of his divine nature and power, all for the purpose of revealing how important it was to trust and believe in him

and God, for only God can truly provide enough of all we need. But how can he do that. This miracle begins to tell us.

I like what one commentator offers, "Notice the simplicity of this account, how easily, how quietly, with such dignity this was done. Jesus says simply, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them to the brim -- not with decaffeinated coffee, but with 120 to 180 gallons of plain, pure water. Then Jesus said, "Now draw some out, and take it to the steward of the feast." There was no prayer, no word of command, no hysterical shouting, no pleading with screwed-up face, no laying on of hands, no binding of Satan, no hocus-pocus or mumbo-jumbo -- nothing. He did not even touch the water. He did not even taste it afterward to see if it had happened. He simply said, "Take it to the governor of the feast." What a beautiful, simple dignity! The water simply became wine. Yet this happened within the limits of a natural process. The water did not become milk, nor did it change into Coca-Cola. What happened was something that happens also in nature. Water is being changed into wine in every vineyard in Northern California right now! It involves a long process of growth, of gathering and crushing; it involves the activity of women and men and the process of fermentation. But it is a natural process."

In his very helpful book *Miracles*, C. S. Lewis points out that every miracle of Jesus is simply a kind of short-circuiting of a natural process; a doing instantly something which in general takes a longer period of time. Lewis says, "Each miracle writes for us in small letters something that God has already written, or will write, in letters almost too large to be noticed, across the whole canvas of nature." Is that what Jesus is doing: overleaping the elements of time, of growth, gathering, crushing, and fermenting? He takes water -- an inorganic, non-living, commonplace substance -- and without a word, without a gesture, without any laying on of hands, in utter simplicity, the water becomes wine, an organic liquid, a product of fermentation, belonging to the realm of life. Jesus, God, maker of heaven and earth, has the marvelous ability to master the processes of nature.

Normally when a process of nature is short-circuited, the results are affected, and the product is not as good. I have a quote in my office that says, "Don't rush things that need time to grow." I mean, we are talking about wine here and wine needs time to age to be at it's best. The very force of this miracle depended upon the fact that it was good wine. This is confirmed by the amazement of the steward of the feast when he drank the wine. Can't you see him taking a cup and sipping it, then swirling it around, smelling of it, drinking it again, smacking his lips and saying, "That's Paul Masson, 1979! It's the best wine I ever drank!" The servants, according to John's account, were smiling to themselves. They knew what had happened. Jesus had happened. God had happened. They remained silent for it was not their place to speak, but they confirmed the fact that this good wine, the best wine, came from jars that had been filled with water.

John's purpose for sharing this miracle was not to highlight the natural process of water being turned into wine. John's purpose always in the stories he shares about Jesus is to blow our minds with the truth of who God is, how God acts, and how we are to act as God's faithful children. Isn't that what a sign is for: to tell you something that you would not otherwise know; to manifest a significance that might otherwise be hidden? Isn't that what John means when he says that this miracle was a sign? What it pictured was the normal outcome of the combination of human and divine activity. We can fill water jars; only God can turn water into wine! We do the ordinary, the commonplace, the normal activity, but God touches it, and brings it to life and gives it flavor, fragrance, and effect. That is the meaning of this sign: it is an indication of what the ministry of Jesus is going to be like whenever he touches a human life, not only during his lifetime on earth, but also through all the running centuries to come, whenever his ministry would be present in the world.

Another reference I like from C. S. Lewis' book, *Miracles*, says, "If we open such books as Grimm's Fairy Tales, or the Italian Epics, we find ourselves in a world of miracles so diverse that they can hardly be classified. Beasts turn into men and men into beasts, or trees. Trees talk, ships become goddesses, and a magic ring can cause tables richly spread with food to appear in solitary places... If such things really happen, they would, I suppose, show that nature was being invaded. But they would show she was being invaded by an alien power. The fitness of the Christian miracles, and their difference from those mythological miracles, lies in the fact that they show invasion by a power which is not alien. They are what might be expected to happen when she is invaded not simply by a god, but by the God of nature; by a power which is outside her jurisdiction; not as a foreigner but as a Sovereign. They proclaim that he who has come is not merely a king, but the King, and the King of nature, her King and ours."

Brothers and sisters in Christ, perhaps more than anything else, I believe this miracle reveals to us that God is a God of abundance, that God knows what we need and will provide only the best for us, and also that we, because of God, not only have enough, but are enough. When we bring God into our situations (allow God to be an active participant in our life) all the humdrum, commonplace activities are touched with a new power that makes them fragrant, flavorful, enjoyable, and delightful, giving joy and gladness to the heart.

The opposite of abundance is scarcity. What do we know about scarcity? Well, during recent years fighting through the pandemic, there was a scarcity of toilet paper, a scarcity of time spent with loved ones, a scarcity of money for many whose jobs were affected, a scarcity of "normalcy." There is a scarcity of baby formula available and hunger concerns around the world, even right here on the streets of Lynchburg, reveal there is a scarcity of food access to those looking for their next meal. Scarcity is relative but it is real. What do we do about it? We could turn to Jesus, "Jesus, Jesus, do something" like Mary did at the wedding. Prayer is always a good option. We could act

and do something with what we have. Sharing is always a good option. We are called to do something as faithful disciples of Jesus and partners in ministry.

If we stop long enough and think about the last few years, where there has been scarcity there has also been generosity. And not just a little generosity, but an abundance. There has been the time spent with those we live with (perhaps we should mention an abundance of patience as well), time and effort given by medical staff and frontline workers, communities rallying around those in need of various resources, of God's grace and comfort when we are at the end of our rope.

In times of anxiety and fear, it is easy to revert to a scarcity mindset. But a scarcity mindset is a barrier to God's generosity and abundance. In John 10:10, Jesus declares, "I came that they (we can read that as you and me), may have life, and have it abundantly." We are invited by God to have an abundance mindset.

Developed and taught from her background as the daughter and granddaughter of Episcopal priests and her years as a student at the London School of Economics, Olivia Saunders offers a modern-day parable that needs repeating and shows how switching our thinking from one of scarcity to one of abundance gives us the potential (with God's help of course) to do extraordinary things.

Holding up a tomato to a crowd of hungry and curious learners, Olivia asks the question, "How many seeds are in this tomato?" To answer the question the hungry and curious learners broke out into small groups and tried to solve the "problem" Olivia posed. Each group had many different ways of calculating an answer. Our group tried to do it by visually recreating what we "thought" an inside of a tomato looked like, quartering it and then, estimating the seeds in each section. The answers differed by a few seeds to a thousand or more seeds.

After waiting just long enough, Olivia said, "There are enough". Enough for me to save to plant next year, enough for me to give to my neighbors so they too can have tomatoes, and then, next year, they will save seeds and give seeds to others just as I will again share my seeds. Thus, "the theory of abundance".

Olivia left the hungry and curious, now somewhat amazed, learners with this sobering question, "Who benefits from seedless fruits and vegetables?" Answer, "The person who has the seeds." Our reality, Olivia points out, is that in an abundant community we have the seeds.

When you think about it, isn't that a miracle able to be played out right here and now?

God of love, light, joy, hope, and peace... God of abundant grace and mercy... God of glory, thank you! Thank you for being all you are and doing all you do. Thank you for being the maker of heaven and earth and being the one able to short-circuit natural processes to care and provide for us and reveal your great power. As we read the stories of the Red Sea parting, and manna raining from heaven, and bushes burning, and babies being born to parents in their old age to fulfill a promise, and water being turned into wine, help us to believe in you and the incredible witness of your eternal influence upon our lives. May we trust in your good news and lean not on our own understanding.

God, we thank you that today is a baptism day, and we pray continuously for Rooney in her baptism. We thank you that today is a day to celebrate reaffirming our faith, and we pray continuously for Graham and Olivia in the promises they have made this day. God, we thank you that today is Father's Day, a day to honor and remember and celebrate those who have served as father figures in our lives, whether biological or adopted, brother or uncle, grand or great grand, friend or mentor. We praise you God for the gift of their presence and for the many gifts they share with us.

God, we pray today for those who are stuck in a scarcity mindset or circumstance. How can we be your instruments of abundance and generosity today? How can we share what we have so they can know of your great love and power?

Today we pray God for those who are waking up with broken hearts having lost a loved one so dear to them. May each not only know of your compassion but truly experience and feel your loving arms around them. There has been a lot of loss in recent weeks. There has been a lot of hurt and hardship and pain. May each know and experience your wholeness.

You are the God who can make the impossible possible, the unable able, and the can't can. May it be so according to your will, O God. We pray all this in the name of Jesus, who taught his disciples of every time and place to pray together... **Our Father...**