

April 23 Adult Spiritual Growth Class Synopsis

Let There Be Light: A Study of FPC Stained-Glass Windows – First Miracle in Cana of Galilee

First Presbyterian Church has been blessed with parishioner memorial gifts of 15 beautiful stained-glass windows over the years, as summarized in the wonderful guide put together by Virginia Wiley in 1990, as part of the 175 year anniversary celebration of the church. The window of focus is that of Jesus' first miracle in Cana of Galilee, located in the Vestibule on the right on the north wall from the front entrance.

The window is one of two in the Vestibule, which are the newest in our church. The window was installed in 1976 with the theme of 'First Miracle in Cana of Galilee' from John 2:1-11, suggested by Dr. Jerold Shetler, the pastor at the time. The window depicts Jesus crowned with the Holy Nimbus, performing His first miracle at Cana robed in white and red, signifying His purity and sinlessness and His suffering and sacrifice, respectively. Jesus' hands are shown out-stretched as in giving the blessing of transformed wine for those of the wedding feast. At the window top are vines filled with grapes, signifying Jesus as the vine in *John 15:5*: "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing". His mother Mary is shown with saintly nimbus and robed in light blue, signifying hope. Six jars of stone used for priestly purification are being attended to by one of the wine stewards, as instructed by Jesus and conveyed by Mary, with the first being delivered by another steward. The bride and groom along with the wedding guests are shown in the background not knowing the source of the new wine as it is being brought.

As Scripture states, "This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him." The wedding is the occasion of the first great miracle of Jesus Christ on the very first week of his public ministry. The first miracle of Moses was to turn water into blood as a sign of God's judgment. However, when Jesus turned the water into wine it was a sign of God's blessing.

Mary, Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. We know that the disciples likely consisted of Andrew, Simon Peter, James, John, Philip and Nathanael, with the latter two being recently received into Christ's circle and with Nathanael actually native to Cana. This is the first of many stories showing that Jesus was always welcome among those enjoying and desiring fellowship, particularly over a meal. In the story Mary recognizes that there is a problem and she brings it to Jesus: "The mother of Jesus said to him 'They have no wine'. Failing to provide adequately for the guests would involve social disgrace. Additionally, wine was a rabbinical symbol of joy. Therefore to run out of wine would almost have been the equivalent of admitting that neither the guests nor the bride and groom were happy.

The recorded words of Mary are few especially in Jesus' ministry so her request is of significance. She is no doubt earnestly anticipating Jesus' day of demonstration, yet she would not force the issue, leaving the matter with Jesus. *His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."* Jesus refers to His mother with a term of respect, but does *not* call her 'mother', thus emphasizing that there was a different relationship with her now. Jesus gives a surprising response to Mary's request: *And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come"*. In John's Gospel, Jesus refers to 'hour' twenty two times, noting the importance of God's perfect plan and timing. Jesus' first public acknowledgement of the 'coming of His hour' does not occur until much later, in the last days of His ministry on earth as given in *John 12:23-30* after He has entered Jerusalem on a donkey with palm leaves of celebration prior to the last meal with His disciples.

In John 2:6-8: Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

The spiritual implications of Jesus' turning water into wine suggests that Jesus shows Himself to be the ultimate High Priest and the sacred space in which the work is done. Stone vessels were common in Judea for ritual purposes, since according to the Law of Moses, stone would not become impure, unlike the often-used pottery of ancient times (*Leviticus 6:28, 11:33-36*). Additionally, running water or living water was considered pure, and collection of water in a stone cistern could be used for purification purposes (*Leviticus 11:36, 15:13*). This 'living water' could be stored in a large stone water jar, which would function like a cistern holding ritually clean water, then later it could be used for purification.

Generally only stone pots would be found in the homes of the priests. These stone pots were much more expensive, and they were not subject to the same laws involving destruction in the event of contact with something or someone unclean. So, the wedding feast was likely taking place at the home of a Levitical priest, and maybe even a High Priest, who acted as the representative and mediator in the Temple between the people and God. The book of Hebrews describes how Jesus acts as our High Priest in our relationship to God (*Hebrews 4:10-9:28*). In the first chapter of the Gospel of John, as well as the second chapter, almost directly following this story, there is mention of Jesus being the Temple or tabernacle (*John 1:14 and 2:19*), which is where the work of the High Priests is done.

Later in the Gospel of John, "living water" is mentioned multiple times. Jesus says in reference to eternal life that He gives living water, and those that drink of it will never again thirst (*John 4:10-15; John 7:38*). Perhaps the stone water jars were used in the miracle as an earlier allusion to drinking the "living water" which Jesus would explain later. Beyond the obvious miracle of turning water into wine that authenticated Jesus as sent from God, there may also be a connection between drinking the wine that Jesus gave them at the wedding and the wine at the Last Supper. The wine, which represented the atonement on the cross through the blood of Jesus, was clearly used to foreshadow the death of Jesus on the cross during the Last Supper, then commemorated by drinking the wine representative of the blood of Jesus during the ritual of the Lord's Supper in the early Church (*Matthew 26:27-29; 1 Corinthians 11:25-26*).

The water is symbolic of the old religion; the wine stands for the new. Jesus' changing of the water into wine shows how, ultimately, the good news of His death in our place and His resurrection to new life so that we can have the same supersedes the Hebrew Law. Not that the Law was bad in and of itself. Jesus Himself said that He didn't come to get rid of the Law. He came to fulfill it (*Matthew 5:17*). The law is even helpful, in that it shows us where we have fallen short of God's holiness (*Romans 3:20*). However, Jesus' work is better... as evidenced by the headwaiter's remark, "Every man serves the good wine first, and when the people have drunk freely, then he serves the poorer wine; but you have kept the good wine until now."

The analogy of Christ the Bridegroom and those who believe and follow Him, His Church, is also conveyed in the wedding miracle, which is spoken by John the Baptist not long after the miracle at Cana (*John 3:29*). Contrary to the practice of many other cultures in which the bride's father would pay the groom's family a dowry, in Jewish culture the groom's father paid a bride price, or *mohar*, to the bride's family in order to negotiate the betrothal and, in essence, "purchase" the bride. The groom would also give a gift to the bride called a *mattan*, which became a part of the property the bride would bring into the marriage. These gifts were not always monetary; they may have been property or even services provided to the bride's family. A good father was expected to share the *mohar* with his daughter or give it over to her entirely. It was a common custom for the bride to join the groom's father's household, rather than the groom and the bride establishing their own household. So, if the bride and groom were of a marriageable age, the groom would return to his father's house after the betrothal to prepare a bridal chamber. This process traditionally took a year or more (the length of time being dictated by the groom's father). When the place was complete, the groom would return and fetch his bride. The bride would not

know the day or hour of her husband-to-be's return, so the groom's arrival was usually announced with a trumpet call and a shout so the bride had some forewarning.

Thus, we are reminded of John 14:3 and Revelation 19:7-9:

"He will return for His bride with a trumpet call and a shout."

"Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear."

The final triumph of God's restoration of all creation is pictured in a heavenly wedding feast in which the redeemed are seen as the bride of Christ. They are clothed in pure white to indicate their heavenly purity. The symbolism then changes. The redeemed, though pictured collectively as a bride, are pictured individually as those invited to share the wedding feast with Christ.

As Christians, we are miraculously transformed by our relationship with Christ just as the water was turned into wine, fully redeemed, awaiting with joy the trumpet call and shout and the celebration of God's new creation.

A song to reflect and pray on:

[\(185\) I Will Wait For You \(Psalm 130\) Lyrics ~ Shane & Shane - YouTube](#)

Looking ahead – Sunday April 30

Chapel Window – Christ With The Children