



Pastor Ken Nelson's Sermon

SERMON – 2ND EPIPHANY

JOHN 2:1-11

JANUARY 16, 2022

“RUNNING ON EMPTY”

Of all the miracles of Jesus, water into wine at the wedding in Cana is the most unique, because it seems to be of little earthly good. It is entirely a show of power – with a purpose of course. When Jesus walked on water, rather than make wine out of it, he did so to save men who were about to drown in it! John tells us the miracle at Cana was to reveal God's glory and inspire faith – yet that is something Jesus did far more consequentially on Golgotha.

John calls this event a “sign” rather than a miracle perhaps because all it did was evoke faith. Then again, what's not miraculous about that – John was pretty clear Jesus had come to his own did not receive him. That some now did was itself something of a win for God. This sign was also the fulfillment of the wedding imagery from our lesson in Isaiah which said one day God would “*delight in his people.*” Well, Jesus appears to be having a delightful time in Cana! There is a sacramental allusion in the story – Jesus makes fine wine ergo Jesus is fine wine ergo “*after supper he took the cup saying drink of it all of you...*” As a story of abundance – wine of the finest quality in quantities almost unimaginable it resonates with Isaiah, Joel, and Amos that foresaw a day the Lord would prepare such a banquet for Israel to signify the end times.

But if God were in Cana to throw a party why write him into the story as a guest, and why would our Lord not have made sure there was plenty of wine before the festivities started? Why allow it to run out? What to make of this little detail? On one hand it's the way Jesus operates in John's gospel. He waited till his friend Lazarus died before coming to visit him, John says, “in order to show God's glory.” He got a bit of a tongue lashing for that from Lazarus' sisters – “*Lord if you had been here our brother would not have died.*”

The Apostle Paul would later ask “why” questions...in Romans 7 he laments his weakness in the face of temptation only to say as chapter 8 begins “*but thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*” In II Corinthians 12 he laments “*a thorn in his flesh.*” Three times he asked the Lord to remove it. God's answer was “*my strength is made perfect in weakness.*” What triggered the miracle at Cana? Was it the faith of Mary - so obviously full of it? We could chat a good long time pondering her statement “*do whatever he tells you.*” After all - she did. But I suggest it was the wine vessels. Could it our Lord's first miracle was a sign for people who are empty - who know what it feels like to say “I've run out...”

In the case of a wedding banquet, running out of wine was embarrassing for a host but little more. And yet, think of it...if our Lord is willing to show his glory when running out of wine was a social faux pas and little else, how much more is our Lord willing to come to someone running on empty in far more consequential ways? I have spoken with people who are caregivers for their loved ones...whose love, faith and determination amazed me yet whose honesty often sobered me...*pastor, I don't know how much longer I can...* And yet, they did. Somewhere in their running on empty a strength to continue came...Glory to God!

We live in a world of unprecedented communication ability, and yet increasing numbers of young people particularly relay how isolated they feel – to the point of despair. This trend existed long before a pandemic. How is it that so many people today can have phones full of images and messages and still be running on empty relationally and in their hearts? Who'll tell them they have a friend in Jesus, who is pretty good at filling things that are empty – to the glory to God!

I read of a pastor who lives on the Columbian-Venezuelan border and whose congregation is watched and regularly visited by members of drug-running gangs. He confided to an interviewer how the pressure exerted on him, his family and his members by these gangs had often squeezed the hope right out of them. *"When we worship, they leave us alone, but when we evangelize, they come after us."* Yet evangelize they do and every time their tank seemed to run empty, the Lord Jesus and his grace was sufficient for them to continue – to the glory to God!

The nation we love and the families and workplaces we live out our lives in are in discord. Choose not to be vaccinated, or respectfully ask someone to wear a mask in your presence and you may find yourself uninvited to a family gathering. We read of many of 2020's "frontline heroes" who in 2022 stand in the unemployment line for the same reasons. In one city parents loudly pull their kids from on-site classes and in another they loudly demand their resumption – the sense of shared sacrifice and respect has all but vanished – we're running on empty. Do we know anyone who can fill our land with it again – we Christians that is – to the glory of God?

Christians live a seeming contradiction ... our Lord in his Sermon on the Mount said, *"blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled,"* and yet of the same Lord Jesus Philippians 2:7 says, *"though in the form of God he emptied himself, taking on the nature of a servant."* Isaiah said a bruised reed he would not break nor a dimly burning wick would he quench, yet our Lord made a whip of cords and drove money changers out of *"his Father's house."* How can you live truth and practice humility – how can you suffer the world's arrows and yet know you have heaven's blessing? How can a you feel empty and yet be full and know in Christ you have all things?

Because Jesus Christ your Savior did what His Father told him to do – that's how. Jesus the heavenly guest became heaven's servant to this world, and John tells us servants fill things. Jesus was sent to knowingly, personally and persistently fill all who this broken and sinful world drains – with the Father's love. His promise *"Come unto me all who labor and are heavy laden"* comes from someone who knows what heavy is, who knows what empty is, and how to bear the heavy and fill the empty – to God's glory and our good.
AMEN