



Sermon Growth Guide

March 10, 2024

People Matter



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All for Love - People Matter

John 2:1-12

Key Verse: John 2:11

“What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.” you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.”

Big Idea: We matter to God. He knows where we're running low in life, and wants to meet us in these places.

Foundations

This miracle by Jesus is an unusual one. Unlike others, it didn't address someone's physical need. It was triggered by Jesus' mother. It was a miracle that surprised everyone except perhaps for her. And it was a miracle Jesus was initially reluctant to perform.

Jesus' miracle addressed more of a social faux pax: running out of wine at a wedding celebration. And His willingness to save a groom from social embarrassment on what should have been the most joyful day of his life tells us something about how our needs matter to God.

Not only did Jesus' actions save a groom from embarrassment—they also moved His disciples to a deeper trust in Him. This story offers a helpful reminder that Jesus is always seeking to deepen our trust in Him and in what He's doing.

15th century Christian mystic Margery Kempe received what she believed was a word from God: “More pleasing to me than all your prayers and works is that you would believe I love you.”

We experience this love every time we encounter God's replenishment of what's missing in our own lives.

Understanding God's Word

Together, read John 2:1-12.

Why did Jesus initially respond to Mary the way He did?

How can Mary's subsequent response be instructive to us in moments when we don't sense God responding to our prayers?

We're told that Jesus' disciples “put their faith in him.” How do you understand this step, given that each had already made the decision to follow Jesus?

Applying God's Word

What are you currently running low on in your life?

What can sometimes make it hard to believe that Jesus knows about your needs, and will help you with them? How can this story help encourage you in this area?

Witnessing God's Word

Not only do your needs matter—the needs of those around you also matter to God. And one of the ways people most clearly see God's love for them is through our love for them. Where and how this week can you be an extension of God's love in someone's life?

ALL FOR LOVE • John 2:1-12 • John Goodale • March 10, 2024

During the season of Lent, we're exploring the love of Jesus in our series **All for Love**.

As we work our way through the early portion of John's Gospel, I invite you to turn to John 2.

Each week of this series we're addressing questions raised by Generation Z. Today's question is do all people matter to God? Does God care about the needs and dignity of all people in all places?

Today's passage gives us a glimpse into God's heart and character, through His Son Jesus. At the risk of giving away the ending to today's story before we even enter into it, we're going to see that yes, **People Matter**—all of them—to God.

Now, before we read this miracle by Jesus, I have to warn you that there are a few unusual things about it. For one thing, it's Jesus' only recorded miracle that was triggered by His mother. It's also a miracle He was initially reluctant to perform. It's a miracle that addresses not a physical need, but one of shame and embarrassment. It's a miracle involving wine, of all things. And it's a miracle no one saw coming, with the possible exception of Jesus' mother.

Years ago, a group of us from First Pres visited a small church in Cana where we remembered this miracle. As we were leaving, we heard shouting in the distance. When it grew louder, we realized it was a wedding procession!

Over the next 15 minutes we stepped back and were treated to a joyful celebration walking before us. First came the elderly: patriarchs and matriarchs of the families, who set up their stools along the route. Next came friends and family of the couple, shouting and celebrating the two. They were followed by the wedding party, doing the same. Finally came the bride and groom-to-be, soaking up the joy and merriment of all who were celebrating their big day with them. It was a wonderful glimpse of what wedding celebrations may have been

like in Jesus' time.

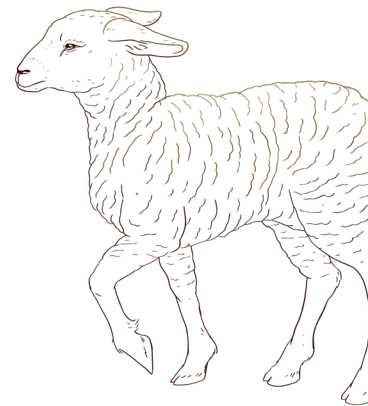
Today, an invitation to a wedding and reception means setting aside part of the day. When this story took place, a wedding celebration could last as long as a week. It was THE place to be, as the community gathered to eat, drink, and interact together around the joyful event. We can only imagine the planning and provisions necessary for a party to go on that long.

The groom and family never wanted to run out of food or drink before the party ended. Not only would that dampen the festivities, it would be painfully embarrassing to the host. Memories of this failure would linger long after the event. Do you remember the Sarikoki wedding? I can't believe they messed up so spectacularly in front of everyone. Yet that's exactly what happened in this story: there was more party than there was wine.

This story illustrates one of the unfortunate truths about life: things always run down, wear out, and give out. So, let me ask this morning: what are you currently running low on in your life? What do you wish you had more of than you do right now? Perhaps there's not enough time or energy for all the demands or responsibilities you're carrying. Maybe there's a desire for greater peace or joy within. For those experiencing ongoing pain or health limitations, hope may be in short supply. Perhaps you're not sure your resources are enough to cover each month's expenses or unexpected bills. Within this large gathering are likely some who long for a greater sense of community.

If someone asked you today what you're running low on in your life, how would you answer? This story reveals that people matter to Jesus; He's willing and able to meet us where we're coming up short. As we unpack today's story, would you allow it to speak into your life and your needs today?

Our story begins with a moment of crisis. On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother



was there, and Jesus and His disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wind was gone, Jesus' mother said to Him, "They have no more wine." (John 2:1-3) We don't know how close these festivities were to their scheduled ending. We don't know if this shortage was due to poor planning, or if the participants were bigger drinkers than anticipated. What we do know is that in Mary's compassion for the couple, she brought this to Jesus' attention. It wasn't, "They have no more wine, let's get out of here!" Mary believed Jesus could do something about this need.

If we're honest, it feels like Jesus brushes Mary off. This wouldn't be a good Mother's Day text! "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." (John 2:4) Though the term "woman" sounds uncaring, Jesus referred to His mother the same way later in this Gospel when He was dying on the cross and asked John to care for her. In Jesus' initial response we see a sensitivity to God's timing for His ministry. He didn't want to prematurely fuel inaccurate expectations of what He'd come to do. So, Jesus turns His mother down!

Has anyone here ever offered a prayer to God that's seemingly gone unanswered? I didn't think so! In such moments, we can respond in two ways. We can assume that's the end of the matter, lower our expectations, and not ask again. Or we can be persistent in expecting that God cares about our needs, which is what we see in Mary: His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." (John 2:5) Mary didn't allow Jesus' seeming disinterest to lower her expectations of Him. While Mary didn't know what He might do, she knew Jesus, and that people mattered to Him.

Sure enough, things begin to happen: 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." (John 2:6-7) Something subtle occurred here—did you catch it? Jesus moved from "No"

to "Fill." There was seemingly a divine realization that responding to this need was consistent with God's timing. It's as if Jesus paused for a moment of silent prayer to run this by His Father. John later tells us that this movement from "No" to "Fill" revealed Jesus' glory.

Nearby were stone jars, in place to wash the hands and feet of guests. Jesus' initial instruction to the servants was simple: Fill them with water. His next instruction, though, required more trust from the servants: Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." (John 2:8) Imagine the awkwardness of these servants, carrying forward liquid from these jars to the one in charge. "Umm, Jesus: they're out of wine, and you're having us take Him water? This isn't going to go well."

Then imagine the servants' surprise upon hearing the master of the banquet's declaration: They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after guests have too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." (John 2:9-10) The common practice was to provide the best wine first, because as things progressed, people became less particular about the quality.

How do you respond when God does something unexpected in your life? John's Gospel makes it clear how another group reacted: What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which He revealed His glory; and His disciples believed in Him. (John 2:11) Jesus is always seeking to deepen our trust in Him and in what He's doing. As New Testament scholar Dale Bruner puts it, "Trusting ourselves to Jesus is a living, repeated, daily movement like breathing or walking." In the previous chapter, these disciples had already trusted Jesus enough to follow Him. Now their trust moved to a deeper level after seeing what He did.



Twentieth-century evangelist Billy Graham's name is well known to many of us. What's less well known is a story that Graham's daughter Ruth told at his funeral. After her 21-year marriage ended in divorce, Ruth moved near an older sister for a fresh start. She began attending a church, where she met a handsome widower, and in her words, "we began to date fast and furiously." Her children didn't like him. Ruth's parents asked her to slow down, and to give them a chance to meet the man. But believing she knew what was best for her life, Ruth quickly married him. Within 24 hours, she realized she'd made a tremendous mistake; five weeks later she fled from her husband, in fear of him. When this second marriage failed, Ruth was running low in a lot of ways.

We'll return to her story in a moment. But before we do, I want to ask the question: What difference did Jesus' miracle make in the grand scheme of things? After all, many at this wedding were seemingly unaware that a miracle had even taken place. Why did Jesus perform His first recorded miracle in this, of all settings? It wasn't because Jesus' mother asked Him to; we read elsewhere that when she and Jesus' family came to take Him home at another time in Jesus' ministry, He refused to go.

No, what likely moved Jesus to act as He did is the need He saw: the shame and embarrassment of a groom during what should have been his most joyful moment. In a moment when this groom was running low, Jesus met his need.

During her own moment of shameful embarrassment, Ruth Graham described what happened next: "I wanted to go talk to my mother and father, but it was a two-day drive. Questions swirled in my mind. What was I going to say to Daddy? What was I going to say to Mother. What was I going to say to my children. I'd been such a failure. What were they going to say to me? 'We're tired of fooling with you.' 'We told you not to do it.' 'You've embarrassed us.' Let me tell you, you women will understand. You don't want to embarrass your father. You really don't want to embarrass Billy Graham."

And then Ruth Graham shared this at her father's funeral: "As I wound myself up the mountain I rounded the last bend in my father's driveway, and my father was standing there waiting for me.

"As I got out of the car he wrapped his arms around me, and he said, 'Welcome home.' There was no shame. There was no blame. There was no condemnation. Just unconditional love. And you know, my father was not God, but he showed me what God was like that day.

"When we come to God with our sin, our brokenness, our failure, our pain, and our hurt, God says, 'Welcome home.'" Ruth Graham

Friends, can you begin to understand how deeply loved you are by God? God knows your needs. He delights in meeting you in these places, welcoming you home when you come to Him. It's true that we don't always recognize God's response. Our faith can be tested when His timing is different than ours. But this doesn't change the fact that you are loved by God and that your needs truly do matter to Him.

I don't know where you may be coming up short this morning. I do know that you matter to God—that He cares about and can do something about your needs. As you see Jesus' loving response to the need of an unnamed groom, would you allow yourself to believe God wants to do the same for you? Can you believe that God knows your needs? That He cares about them? That He'll help you with them? If so, where are you running short right now, that you can bring to Jesus?

Fifteenth century Christian mystic Margery Kempe received what she considered a word from God. I close with these words: "More pleasing to me than all your prayers and works is that you would believe that I love you." We experience this love every time we encounter God's replenishment of what's missing in our lives. Is it time to ask Jesus to fill what's running low in your life?

