



**SECOND SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY  
JANUARY 20, 2019  
LUKE 2: 1-11  
“LIVING WINE, TRANSFORMING WINE”**

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 wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.”

“Woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.”

His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

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.”

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 the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.”

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.

- A minister is driving down the road and is stopped for speeding. The state trooper smells alcohol on his breath, sees an empty wine bottle on the car mat, and asks, “Sir, have you been drinking?”

- The minister says, “just water.”
- “Then why do I smell wine on your breath?”
- The minister looks down at the wine bottle and exclaims, “Good Lord, he’s done it again!”
- There are many ways to follow Jesus and we all have to find our own way, both individually and, hopefully, as part of a faith community like clc.
- One way to divide the followers of Christ into two groups is through who believes Jesus turned water into wine and therefore use wine for holy communion. And then there are those who think Jesus turned water into grape juice and use grape juice for Communion.
- On the surface, this may seem like a simple and even simplistic division, but that’s what I’d like to explore with you this morning.
- Up until about the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most mainline congregations used wine for the Lord’s Supper. Then, an influential Methodist layperson began a campaign urging churchgoers to use grape juice instead of wine. Based on fears over the dangers of alcohol and the piety of certain believers, his campaign won the day. Slowly, various mainline and non-denominational churches began using grape juice in the celebration of Holy Communion....
- Oh, I almost forgot to tell you. The Methodist fellow’s last name was **Welch**. Yep, that Welch.
- You can’t make this stuff up!
- Just goes to show it is dangerous to be more religious than Jesus....
- Because Jesus is at a Jewish wedding where the sharing of **wine** is a central ritual.

- Under a canopy, a Rabbi recites a blessing over wine, praising God for preserving the sanctity of the family and of the Jewish people. The bride and groom drink from the wine.
- Blessings are recited over the wine, since wine is symbolic of life: it begins as grape juice, goes through fermentation where it turns sour, but in the end turns into a superior product that brings joy. The full cup of wine at the wedding symbolizes the overflowing of divine blessing, as in the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm: “My cup runneth over.”
- The process of grape juice transforming to wine shows us the transforming process of spiritual life.
- We each begin as a person who, along the way, encounters a fermentation process that we call suffering which turns us sour for a time, yet if we allow the process to fully unfold we turn into a superior product that brings us and others joy.
- This spiritual process of transformation is hidden from our eyes each Sunday if we commune with untransformed grape juice that remains grape juice with no symbolic transforming power....
- Deb came back from her Florida trip two Sunday nights ago and we were sitting and talking. While she sipped her glass of wine, she said, “I love you so much, you know. I don’t know how I could ever live without you.”
- I said, “Is that you or the wine talking?”
- She said, “It’s me talking to the wine.”
- Man, that’s cold.
- Yet, there is a connection between the love for the spirit of the wine and love for the spirit of God.

- Carl Jung, the psychologist, corresponded with Bill W., the founder of alcoholics anonymous and, in one of his letters, he wrote this:
- “Craving for alcohol is the equivalent on a low level of the spiritual thirst of our being for wholeness expressed as union with God.
- The only right and legitimate way to such an experience is that it happens to you in reality and it can only happen to you when you walk on a path which leads you to a higher understanding.”
- The spirit of alcohol **momentarily** gets us high when what we need is a **permanent** higher understanding.
- Jung continues, “Alcohol in Latin is ‘*spiritus*’ and you use the same word for the highest religious experience as well as for the most depraved poison. The helpful formula is *spiritus contra spiritum*.” Spirit against spirit.
- Some of the most deeply spiritual people I know are recovering alcoholics and drug addicts. Earlier in their lives, they had sought the spirit in the bottle or in the drug instead of in the spirit of God, but once on the spiritual path, they dive deeply into the spiritual waters.
- Rather than being occasionally, frequently, or consistently filled with the spirit of the bottle, the high of illegal drugs or prescription medications, we must find a way to open ourselves to the spirit of God coming to us in the presence of the wine maker, Jesus Christ.
- Recently, **60 minutes** had a segment on the distilling of Scotch on one of the northernmost islands off the coast of Scotland. And the master Scotch distillers talked about how Scotch creates joy in the drinker. And, sadly, this is what can drive some people to drink to the point of excess—chasing the effect of joy to momentarily replace sadness, anxiety, or suffering.

- Or one can go to the opposite extreme and never touch Scotch or wine or other spirits....
- A man in his sixties went to a new doctor and was put through a series of exhaustive tests. Afterwards, the doctor said the guy was doing “fairly well” for a man of his age. This worried him, so he asked, “Doc, do you think I’ll live to be ninety?”
- The doctor asked, “Do you smoke or drink wine or beer?”
- “No, nothing like that. And I don’t do drugs, either.”
- “Okay, do you eat steak or ribs?”
- “No, my old doctor told me all red meat is unhealthy.”
- “Alright. Do you spend a lot of time in the sun, playing golf, hiking, biking?”
- “No, nothing like that.”
- “And what about gambling, driving fast cars, or lots of time with various women?”
- “No, never.”
- Then why do you even care?”
- Because of its color and the fact it is made from what is called the “vital sap” of the grapevine, wine is most often a symbol of blood. The blood of Christ. The blood that courses through our bodies.
- In the religious imagination, wine is widely regarded as the elixir of life and a liquid of immortality.
- Because of its intoxicating effect, it is sometimes seen as a means of attaining spiritual knowledge. A beverage of divine love.
- In the mind of the mystics, the soul is imagined as surrounded by the wine of immortality before the creation of the world.
- Biblical authors see wine as a symbol of the joy and abundance of God’s gifts.

- This deeply soulful and spiritual perspective is why it is so important that Jesus' first miracle is transforming water into wine. **Be uplifted! Be surprised by joy! Taste this elixer of everlasting life! Be infused with spiritual knowledge! Taste the lord and know he is intoxicating!**
- I don't think there is any way to avoid the reality that a significant draw in large non-denominational churches is their joyful contemporary worship. Or do we hide our heads in the sand and ignore the fact that over 16,000 people attended Christmas Eve services at Orchard Hill? Or that over 5000 people attend worship at Northway Community Church every Sunday?
- The Spirit of God, just like the spirit of the bottle is meant to over-ride the ego, filling us with experience of the intoxicating love of the spirit.
- When the German Lutheran theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer visited the United States in World War II, he visited various congregations throughout the country.
- He said he caught a glimpse of the living church in the historically black churches. He participated in Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church, where Adam Clayton Powell, senior was pastor. He was captivated by the lively worship, the immediacy of the presence of Christ in the midst of suffering, and its powerful expression of faith in its joyful music.
- Too often, too many mainline congregations, known as God's frozen chosen by many, settle for tepid worship that does not move us emotionally to joy, that does not replace our sad spirits and depressed souls with the spirit of God and does not lift us out of the doldrums into the presence of Christ in the midst of our suffering....
- Matthew Fox, the Roman Catholic theologian, writes about original blessing rather than original sin, reminding us that the universe is fundamentally a **blessing**. That the *via positiva*, the positive path of spirituality, is one of **awe, delight, and amazement**. That the *via creativa*, the creative path of spirituality,

is one of **birthing, creativity, and passion**. That the *via transformativa*, is the joyful path of **healing and celebration**.

- A woman was driving home in northern Arizona when she saw an elderly Navajo woman walking on the side of the road. She stopped the car and asked the woman if she'd like a ride. The woman thanked her and got in the car. After a few minutes, the Navajo noticed a brown bag on the back seat and asked the driver what was in the bag.
- The driver said, "It's bottle of wine. I got it for my husband."
- The Navajo woman thought for a minute, "good trade."
- Jesus offers a good trade: wine for water. Eternal life that begins now for life that slowly drags to a dead end. Meaning for meaninglessness. Joy and serenity for anxiety and chaos. **Good trade!**
- Listen again to the master of the banquet, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best until now."
- "What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory."
- In spiritual language, glory means that **we experience God's presence in a tangible way**. Like a good buzz brought about by good wine, God's presence in our lives is to be that tangible, palpable, and enlivening.
- Be transformed! Be filled with the spirit! Experience the joy of the elixer of Jesus!
- SERMON SONG: **TENNESSEE WHISKEY** BY CHRIS STAPLETON