

January 20, 2019 (February 17, 2019)  
John 2:1-11 - "Magic and Miracles"

You've heard John's version of the miracle of the wedding at Cana. I would also like to share a second version, as told by British comedian Rowan Atkinson, perhaps more commonly known as Mr. Bean or Johnny English.

And on the third day, there was a marriage in Cana at Galilee, and it came to pass that all the wine was drunk. And the mother of Jesus said unto the Lord, "They have no more wine." And Jesus said unto the servants, "Fill six water pots with water." And they did so. And when the steward of the feast did taste of the water from the pots, it had become wine. And he knew not whence it had come.

But the servants did know. And they applauded loudly in the kitchen. And they said unto the Lord, "How on earth did you do that?" And they inquired of him, "Do you do children's parties?" And the Lord said, "No." But the servants did press him, saying, "Go on, give us another one."

And so he brought forth a carrot. And said, "Behold this, for it is a carrot." And all about him knew that it was so, for it was orange with a green top. And he did place a large red cloth over the carrot, and then removed it, and lo, he held in his hand a white rabbit. And all were amazed and said, "This guy is really good! He should turn professional."

And the people said unto him, "We've never seen anything like this. This is great. You shouldn't be wasting your time in a small, one-camel town like Cana. You should be playing the big arena in Jerusalem." And Jesus did harken unto their words, and he did go unto Jerusalem.

And he did his full act before the scribes and pharisees and the Romans. But alas, it did not please them in their hearts. In fact, they absolutely crucified him.

Although Atkinson is intending to be somewhat irreverent, he hits upon a particularly important point for our faith. Are magic tricks and miracles the same thing? Some of us, myself included, have a habit of saying that things we can't explain or don't understand are "like magic." And then we have miracles, which we more often apply to things that benefit other people. Magic is puzzle pieces fitting together or science experiments or magic tricks themselves. Miracles are things that seem magical, but could only be divine in origin. Healings. Five thousand hungry people having enough food to eat. Or even ordinary water being changed into wine late in the wedding feast.

As far as Jesus' miracles go, this seems like a rather small, even trivial and unimportant, miracle to start his ministry out. Jesus has been baptized in the river Jordan by John the Baptist, and he's heading out into public life. So what does he do? He goes to a wedding. Maybe he got dragged there by his mother. Maybe it's a family wedding. Whatever the reason, instead of going out into Galilee and preaching the gospel and helping the masses, Jesus goes to a comparatively normal wedding. And he's clearly not very involved in what's going on. Like most weddings I've heard stories of, this one has its share of imminent disasters, which Jesus doesn't seem to care about. It takes Mary telling Jesus that the guests have run out of wine to drink, and basically going behind his back and telling the servants to do whatever Jesus asks them to do before Jesus does anything about it. And so, somewhat reluctantly, Jesus ends up saving the day. The social disaster of the year doesn't happen.

But it's an odd miracle compared to the other ones we read about in the gospels. People aren't healed or fed. The steward and the groom have no idea who's provided the wine, just that it's good and the celebration can continue. In fact, the only people who seem to know what's happened are the servants, Mary, and the disciples who believed in Christ afterwards. But maybe this says something about what miracles are to Jesus. They aren't magic tricks, designed to entertain and delight us. They may be something unexplainable. They may benefit people who know exactly what's happening, as people are healed or fed. And these miracles may be completely unknown blessings in the form of sharing and celebration. Miracles are a gesture of God's loving-kindness to the world, regardless of who's around. Because Jesus cares about life milestones. He wants us to be able to celebrate weddings and funerals, births and adoptions, birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, reunions. These are miracles that we get to celebrate, and Jesus gives them to us as a gift.

Jesus acts in the daily exchanges of our lives with over-the-top generosity. Everyday events and celebrations are also miracles, along with those things that we can't explain. Life is itself a miracle, and we get to participate in it fully with Jesus' behind the scenes blessings. Maybe there's magic, maybe there isn't. I've long since given up hope that my Hogwarts letter will come. But I do know that there are miracles. When I see flowers begin to sprout in spring, I know that God is working through nature. When the chemistry that results in delicious food works, I know that God is working. When our bodies and genetic codes know how to create life out of microscopic cells, I know that God is working.

I could say that it's like magic. But what would happen if we used the word "miracle" instead, each time we say that something's like magic? Maybe we'd see that the miracles Jesus

has for us are not always extraordinary circumstances. Not everyone gets the miraculous healing. People go hungry. Bad things happen. But there are still miracles all around for us to recognize.

John the Baptist stood in the desert, and people came to him to hear the word of God. But God's Word-made-flesh, Jesus Christ, isn't out there waiting for us to come to him. He goes out to the people, to share the good news of God's coming and God's glory. Sometimes, this comes in big way. But more often than not, we see God's glory in small ways, that are only clear in their celebratory nature. Jesus doesn't go to the wedding intending to do anything showy. He works a small miracle that few people truly recognize, so that everyone can continue doing what they're already doing: having a good time, celebrating a couple's future together, sharing in fellowship around the table. These are ordinary, everyday miracles. The miracle of food which is shared around the table. The miracle of the world around us, growing and changing with the seasons, however much we may dislike the snow and ice! The miracle of life milestones. Each time we say, "Where did the time go?", we're recognizing that God has given us a gift. It's not particularly extravagant, but it's generous. We're given life, and the chance to share it with those around us. And that's a more precious gift than the joy or laughter of any typical magic trick.

The divine mystery and miracle of our God is that God is responsive to human needs. But God doesn't always respond with the big grand gestures. God doesn't need to take out an ad in the paper in order to do this work of seeing a need in our lives and responding to it. Most people may not even see it, or will attribute God's work to something else. Maybe we call it magic or coincidence or science of simply "doing the right thing." But these small things can be God's work, too. The Holy Spirit nudges us to do something, or someone to help us. God works in and

through creation and the world around us. God is the source of all knowledge and all things that bring us joy.

Author Madeline L'Engle said that the job of the everyday Christian is to serve lavishly what you've been given. She says, "It may be that turning six jars of water into wine will be your given task, but I doubt it. On the other hand, it could mean turning your jar of peanut butter into sandwiches for the homeless, or turning your voice into corporate praise on Sunday morning." At the wedding in Cana, Jesus saw an opportunity to give generously, and quietly, to the celebrations. It could so easily be played out as a magic trick. But very few people knew where the wine had come from. Those who did recognized it as a gift from God. The glory of God keeps everyday life going, benefitting the wedding guests in ways that they're not even aware of.

The miracle of the water into wine in Cana borders on magic, but it's not. With Jesus, there's no such thing as magic. There is, however, the miracle of divine presence. Jesus acts unseen and unknown in the daily facets of life. So instead of thinking of miracles as something special and unique that very few of us get to experience, what would happen if we thought of miracles as something that happens to each one of us every single day?

There's a lot in the world that we don't understand, either because it hasn't yet been discovered or we don't have that particular set of knowledge. And even with the things we do know, there's a certain beauty to seeing everything in the world through the eyes that God has provided this world and this life for us. As we receive, so we are also called to return. God is using each of us to continue to work miracles of abundance and generosity for the world around us. Each celebration we join in, every form of worship we give, each time we share what we have, every moment of gratitude. These are gifts from God that get passed along and multiplied

so that all people might see the glory of God. God's glory isn't just in the thousands being fed, or the blind being given their sight, or the earth shaking and the tombstone being rolled away. God's glory is also an every day kind of miracle, that we get to see and recognize and share with those around us. And that is better than any magic trick in the books.

Let us pray:

Generous God, you give to us abundantly. Help us to recognize the small ways that you provide for us to see your glory. May we share in that same spirit of generosity, multiplying your gifts for the people around us in whatever way we're able to. Amen.