

JOHN 2:1–11. (EHV)

Three days later, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there. Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no wine." Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My time has not come yet." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Six stone water jars, which the Jews used for ceremonial cleansing, were standing there, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus told them, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim. Then he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." And they did. When the master of the banquet tasted the water that had now become wine, he did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew). The master of the banquet called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when the guests have had plenty to drink, then the cheaper wine. You saved the good wine until now!" This, the beginning of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

Is the single life the good life? We Americans as a whole certainly seem to think so. One study showed that the marriage rate in the United States has dropped by nearly 60% over the past fifty years. Anecdotally, I've performed a total of seven marriages in my fifteen years in the public ministry, and one of those was my brother Zach's. Here at Trinity, I didn't have any marriages to perform last year, and I didn't have any the year before that either.

I'm not exactly sure what the causes are. I sense that it's related to the normalization of self-centeredness in our society, the normalization of people just wanting to live for themselves and viewing life primarily as an opportunity to pursue all their personal hopes and dreams. And I'll include the growth of the pornography industry in this category. It's awfully hard to be self-centered and be in a happy marriage. It's awfully hard to be self-centered and to want to get married in the first place.

I sense that it's related to the unhappy marriages that many young people have seen and experienced growing up. If you associate marriage with yelling, arguing, and slamming doors, why would you want any part of that?

I sense that it's related to the steady abandonment of real, in-person relationships in favor of more shallow digital relationships. You can't just log into a marriage whenever you want, see what you want to see and say what you want to say, and then log out.

I sense that it's related to what I'll call the softening of our society. People increasingly don't know how to do tough work and deal with unpleasantness and conflict and just try to avoid it as much as possible. And even in the best of marriages, there is at least some unpleasantness, and marriage is hard work. So many people avoid it.

So the single life must be the good life, right?

If the single life is the good life, then Jesus had it really good, didn't he? After all, Jesus was celibate. No girlfriend drama. No domestic issues. No problems back at home.

Except celibate Jesus celebrated marriage. He even performed his very first miracle at a wedding. And in performing that miracle, he indicated that he wanted everyone else to celebrate

marriage too, and he helped them to do so. Jesus celebrated marriage in its own right, and he celebrated it as a foretaste of what was to come.

1. In Its Own Right

Celibate Jesus celebrated marriage, first of all, in its own right, on its own merits. Here at the beginning of his Gospel, the apostle John records the events of a string of days not long after Jesus had been baptized, had then been tempted in the wilderness for forty days, and had then returned. On the first day of this string of days, John the Baptist testified about himself and about the Messiah whose way he was preparing. On the second day, John saw Jesus and pointed to him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. On the third day, he saw Jesus again and pointed him out again, and two of his disciples, John and Andrew, followed Jesus and got acquainted with him and also acquainted Jesus with Andrew's brother, Peter. On the fourth day, Jesus wanted to leave for Galilee and found Philip and made him his follower, and Philip found Nathanael and brought him to Jesus.

We're now told that on the third day after that, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, which we find out later was also Nathanael's hometown, and Jesus, Jesus's mother, and Jesus's five disciples were also invited to the wedding. Jesus didn't say, "No, thanks. Weddings are such a drag." He didn't say, "Why would I come and celebrate something that causes people so much misery?" He didn't say, "I've already got my bros, and that's all I need." He and his disciples all accepted.

And they accepted in spite of the fact that weddings were a big ordeal back then. A typical Jewish wedding was hosted not at some specially designated reception hall, but by the groom at his and his bride's new home. And the wedding feast usually wasn't a single meal, speeches, and a dance on one evening, but a week-long affair. Now, not every guest attended all seven days; some guests left early, and other guests would arrive to take their place. Only the Best Man was expected to stay for the entire seven-day festival. But it seems clear that Jesus and his disciples were there for at least a couple days, if not more, since they were there when the wine ran out. I don't imagine that happened on the first day.

This was potentially a horrible embarrassment for the bride and especially the groom. You don't run out of wine at your wedding. Finding out that there was no more wine would have essentially killed the celebration. It would have been like the lights going out in the reception hall at 8 p.m. and the power not coming back on. What are you going to do? You might as well go home.

When the wine ran out, Mary immediately found Jesus and told him, "They have no wine."

Now here's where it gets interesting. Jesus tells her, "Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My time has not come yet." Jesus knows that his mother wants him to help the situation, but he's on a divine timetable, and it seems like what Jesus is saying is that timetable didn't have him revealing himself as the Messiah through a miracle yet.

But Mary, undeterred, immediately tells the servants or attendants, "Do whatever he tells you." If this isn't a real interaction between a mother and a son, I don't know what is. You can imagine the drop-dead serious look on Mary's face. And then I imagine her turning back to Jesus, giving him one more trusting look, and walking away. She has to know, right? She has to know

who her son is and what he is capable of. She has to know his heart. She has to know he is going to help, out of love for her, out of love for the newly wedded bride and groom, out of love for marriage.

And sure enough, even though his time has not come yet, Jesus tells the attendants to fill six stone water jars that each held twenty to thirty gallons. And once they were filled to the brim, he told them to draw some out and take it to the caterer. And somewhere between the attendants drawing the liquid out and the liquid touching the caterer's lips, the water had been turned into wine, and not just into any old wine, but fine wine! And 120 to 180 gallons of it!

Now Jesus was certainly not encouraging drunkenness. The Bible clearly condemns drunkenness. We also have to remember that in those days they diluted their wine with water—two to three parts of water for every one part of wine. Nevertheless, clearly Jesus was also no teetotaler. The Psalms say that God gives us wine to gladden our hearts (104:15). Good alcoholic beverages available in abundance and enjoyed in moderation make for a warm and enjoyable atmosphere with a lot of smiles and laughter. 120 to 180 gallons of wine would certainly be enough to last the rest of the wedding feast, probably with plenty left over.

What was Jesus doing? He was essentially saying, "The party must go on! This wedding and marriage must be celebrated! And I want everyone who attends to be able to do so without any concern for supplies!"

Celibate Jesus celebrates marriage. And why shouldn't he? As true God, he was the one who first noted that it isn't good for a man to be alone. He is the one who instituted marriage, who built Eve from Adam's rib and walked her down the aisle to Adam, causing him to speak the first poem, a love poem. He is the one who inspired Solomon to write, "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord."

When people get married, they are no longer alone. When they have an idea, when they have a reflection, when they have a random musing on life, when they see something beautiful or noteworthy, when they hear something funny or something sad or tragic, they have someone to share it with. I once attended the wedding of two of my classmates who married each other, and the grandfather of one of them stood up after the meal—I think he was well into his eighties by then—and with wrinkled face and thinning hair and one eye drooping lower than the other spoke about his marriage with the passion of a groom on his wedding day. Playing off of 1 Corinthians 13, he spoke of the blessings of marriage and said, "Now these three remain: intimacy, children, and companionship. But"—and here his voice cracked—"the greatest of these is companionship." Those getting married have someone to share life with. Not to mention that they each immediately gain a second set of parents and siblings.

The wife has a protector and provider and someone who will defend her honor. The husband has a helper and encourager, in many cases a cook and a cleaner and a schedule-keeper, not to mention someone who will make sure he doesn't die or make a fool of himself saying or doing something stupid. They each have an adviser and someone to make important decisions with. They have someone to travel and take vacations with. They can broaden each other's horizons with their knowledge, talents, and interests. They have someone to buy or make for them thoughtful and pretty gifts. They have someone to keep them warm at night, and to kiss in the morning. Then of course there are the children they can now bear and raise together, if God so blesses them.

What's not to celebrate? If you are someone who grew up with a father and mother who always argued, or if you have had an unfaithful spouse, don't let them ruin for you that which Jesus celebrated. If you are someone whose face is always glued to a screen, don't let modern technology and social media ruin for you that which Jesus celebrated. If you grew up having everything handed to you and getting everything you wanted, don't let the unpleasantness and hard work of marriage overshadow that which Jesus celebrated. And if you, like me and everyone else, struggle with self-centeredness, don't let your personal hopes and dreams and pleasure-seeking cause you to cheapen and think little of one of the greatest blessings that God has still left us in this fallen world. Crucify your sinful, selfish nature by the power of the Holy Spirit given to you in your baptism, so that you, too, can fill a glass of wine, literally or metaphorically, in celebration of that which Jesus celebrated.

2. As a Foretaste of What Was to Come

But celibate Jesus didn't just celebrate marriage in its own right. He also celebrated it because of what it pointed to. Did you catch it? "This, the beginning of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee."

This was a sign, a miracle that pointed to a bigger, more important truth than "weddings and marriages are great." It's the same thing that the Lord's Supper points to. "I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until from now the day I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29). This marriage feast, and the way Jesus miraculously and abundantly enhanced it, was a sign pointing to the ultimate marriage feast.

Because, you see, celibate Jesus isn't actually celibate. He has a bride. His bride was the reason he didn't take a bride on earth, so that he could devote himself entirely to her. His bride was the reason he performed this miracle, even though his time had not yet come. His bride was the reason he went to the cross and suffered and died, so that he could pay for a spotless dress of righteousness for her. His bride was the reason he rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, so that he could prepare a home for her. His bride is the reason he will return to judge the living and the dead, so that he can take his bride to be with him and enjoy the ultimate wedding feast and celebration, one that doesn't just last a week, but an eternity.

Jesus's bride is of course his Church, the communion or fellowship of the saints, the body of all those who believe in him as their Lord and Savior from sin, death, and the devil. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 5: "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, by cleansing her with the washing of water in connection with the Word. He did this so that he could present her to himself as a glorious church, having no stain or wrinkle or any such thing, but so that she would be holy and blameless."

This sign, Jesus's miracle, points to the fact that, even if you remain single your entire life, you are never alone. You have a head, a provider, a protector, someone to defend your honor before the devil and the world, someone who provides not just the bare minimum of what you need, but pours out gallons of blessings on you in abundance, just like he did for this newly wedded couple.

I mentioned a marriage rate statistic before. Here's another statistic. In a recent survey, twenty-one percent of adults reported that they were seriously, regularly lonely. That's about one in five people. In the age group of 30–44, the first generation that cut its teeth on so-called

“social” media, it was twenty-nine percent, more than one in four people. And you can find studies that find much worse.

It doesn't have to be that way. Physically, it doesn't have to be that way if we collectively delight in God's word and delight in the things Jesus delights in and celebrates, including marriage, which Jesus instituted in part to protect us from loneliness. Spiritually, it doesn't have to be that way when we realize that we constitute a bride that has the best husband, who is always faithful, who never leaves us or forsakes us, who always loves and forgives us, who is always with us, and who is preparing the ultimate wedding to celebrate with us in heaven. Amen.