

“The Good News Catches Us by Surprise”

John 2:1-11

First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

February 22, 2026

Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

“Where did this come from?” he asked the servant.

After all, he had tasted the wine that they started serving on the first day of the celebration and it was nowhere near this good. It was more reflective of a \$4 bottle of Boone’s Farm than a respectable bottle of luxury wine.

And here they were, three days into this week-long celebration...they were at the point where guests had been lulled into relaxation and joy with food from a bounteous harvest and lingering glasses of wine.

This was *not* the point in a party when the host typically brought out the good stuff.

But not only was this the good stuff, there was plenty of it!

*Where* did this come from?

This is the story that the gospel writer John tells us begins Jesus’ public ministry. And typically when we hear it, we focus on other parts of the story.

We like to wonder about the interaction between Jesus and his mom. Was this a point of conflict, a mother who knew it was time for her son to do more and a son who wasn’t sure he wanted to leave the nest? Was this playful banter, with both Jesus and Mary knowing more than anyone else around them?

We sometimes just read this story with easy acceptance because we expect Jesus to be a miracle worker and we know his ministry has to start somewhere.

But if we begin to wonder about this story, we might just be surprised.

Do you ever wonder about it? If so, what do you ask?

Do you ever wonder why a wedding? Why was this where Jesus’ first sign took place?

In many ways the stories at the beginning of the other gospels make more sense to us. Jesus starting his ministry with teaching? We get that. Jesus starting his ministry with healing? We get that. Jesus starting his ministry by exorcising demons from people? Even we who aren’t really sure what that means, even we can understand why that might make sense. And Luke’s story of Jesus reading the

scripture in the synagogue and making a proclamation about his ministry? We are people who know what mission and vision statements are, so we are definitely comfortable with that Jesus.

But why a wedding? Sure weddings are common, even more so in his day than ours. But still, why there?

After all, weddings are not only joyful celebrations but also in many ways frivolous. We aren't the first people to spend lots of time and money and energy to make the wedding celebration just right. That was even true in Jesus' day.

So what does it mean for John to tell us that Jesus' first sign is done in the midst of this extravagant party?

Perhaps it tells us something about God.

And that might, at first, be hard for us to see. Because we have spent too much of our lives being told that ours is a God of limitations...that ours is a God of rules...that ours is a God who will get angry if we don't toe the line. We have heard those messages plenty.

But, what if John is reminding us of the extravagance of God? What if John starts out Jesus' ministry in the midst of a party to point us to a God who delights in our humanity, who isn't only there to keep us in line, but also to sit back and celebrate with us?

What if John is reminding us that just when we think we know what to expect...just when we think the good wine is gone and the next round will be Boone's Farm...God has a surprise for us?

And what difference would it make in how we live our lives of faith if we really knew...deep down inside...that ours is a God of abundance and of joy and of surprises?

See, we've been told that we need a healthy dose of fear in our relationship with God. We've been told that we need rules to keep us in line, that we need black and white answers to keep us from going astray.

But what if God is the one who shows up not to scold us or even just to comfort us in hard times, but what if God is also showing up to celebrate with us and even encourage us to let loose once in a while? What if God is tossing grace and love upon us like confetti? And what if we aren't even noticing?

See, we are told that without the rules, we will misbehave. We are told that without the threat of punishment, we will go wild. But what if these are messages of the earthly empires that work to keep us under their thumbs rather than being messages of God?

Sure, boundaries are helpful, they are healthy, they help us be healthy. And, I'll be honest, I am cut from the fabric of a rule-following people. I believe that structures are there to guide us and help us and I have been fortunate throughout my life to experience healthy boundaries and structures, as well as to have the power and influence to change them when change was necessary.

But, what if we worship a God whose primary focus isn't on controlling our behavior, but instead a God who believes that we have everything we need inside of us that will allow us to live in life-affirming ways for ourselves and others?

What if we worship a God who knows that love has been planted so deeply within us that we are able to live from it?

What if we worship a God who trusts us to be bearers of joy and love and grace in this world?

Lizzie McManus-Dail, in our Lenten devotional, writes, "Behold: Jesus' debut act of ministry. It's not a healing, or an exorcism, or turning tables for justice. Jesus' first act is to help ensure a party becomes the best party possible. It's a total surprise.

"Because this... this is who Jesus is. Jesus doesn't have to begin with defeating evil because he knows ultimately evil doesn't stand a chance against a God who loves disco and his mother. Evil doesn't stand a chance against a God who is not only not afraid of scarcity, but laughs in the face of it. Evil doesn't stand a chance against a God who will never let an empty cistern or full tomb have the final word. Evil is predictable. But our God loves a surprise because God knows the plot twist is the same every time: God's goodness will overflow. Every single time" (Rev. Lizzie McManus-Dail in "Commentary on John 2:1-11, Matthew 13:31-32" from *Tell Me Something Good: A Sermon Planning Guide*, A Sanctified Art LLC, [sanctifiedart.org](http://sanctifiedart.org)).

Friends, how would your life be different if you knew, in every cell of your being, that ours is a generous God? What would change if you paused in the midst of God's abundance? How would you be differently shaped if you really let God's love flow over and within you?

Because generosity...abundance...love without limits...this is exactly who God is. And this is exactly who we are called to be.

Pay attention...don't be tricked by the empires that seek to control. Listen well...be willing to hear God's heart. Because God is full of surprises! Amen.