

The Jesus I Want to Know:  
The Joyful Provider  
John 2:1-11

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The season of Lent has arrived. It's time to repent and believe the Gospel. We are encouraged to remember that we are mortal, as if our bodies would ever let us forget. Lent is a 40-day period of self-examination and self-denial — except for Sundays. Tucked into these forty days are six “little Easters” — days to remember that God in Jesus Christ gives us the victory over sin, over death, over all that destroys our relationship with Him.

So this First Sunday of Lent, I invite you not to the wilderness of temptation but to a wedding at Cana of Galilee. I don't know about you, but I've had all the forced fasting my body can stand, and I have learned over the last year what it means to live by faith and “pray without ceasing.” So these Lenten Sundays let's take a new look at Jesus as portrayed in the gospel of John. He's someone you need to know. Your life will be enriched by a powerful personal relationship with Jesus Christ. After all, Christianity is not primarily a religion, it is fundamentally a relationship — a relationship with Jesus Christ.

**The Jesus I want to know is a JOYFUL JESUS.**

Bobby was having his share of trouble in school. He wouldn't pay attention, never did his homework, and generally found it difficult to behave in class. His parents, though not religious, finally decided a change of scenery might do Bobby some good, so they took him out of the public school and enrolled him in a private catholic school. From the first day, they could see a change. Bobby came home from school, went straight to his room and did his homework. His grades improved. His behavior changed. At the end of the first grading period things were so much better that Bobby's parents decided to have a little talk with him. “What's the difference,” they asked? “Is it the uniforms, the nuns, the rules, the rewards? What is it that has made such a dramatic difference?” “Well,” replied Bobby, “the first day I walked into that school and saw a huge painting of that guy nailed to a cross, I knew these people meant business, so I'd better get to work.” Fear can be a friend of reindeer, rabbits, and humans when danger is near. But we will never be intimate friends with those we fear.

One year ago this Lent, Mel Gibson made millions of dollars by encouraging churches to rent out whole theaters to see The Passion of Christ — a blood, guts, and tears rendition of the crucifixion of Jesus. Jesus was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. That's why none of us need suffer alone.

But Jesus was also a man of joy, acquainted with celebration, one who seldom missed a party. Critics called Him a glutton and wine bibber. When the Pharisees criticized Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath, Jesus replied — *If you have a*

*sheep who falls into a pit on the Sabbath wouldn't you help it out? How much more valuable is a man than a sheep?*

In John's gospel we don't have a temptation story. That's in Matthew, Mark and Luke. Jesus' first encounter is not with Satan in the wilderness where he is tempted from hunger to turn stones into bread, but with his mother at a wedding in Cana of Galilee where he is challenged to change water into wine.

Here in the midst of Lent, on this little Easter, paint me a smiling Jesus. I've seen plenty of pictures of Him on a cross. And I've seen a few, but a very few, of a smiling Jesus.

I need to know that the joy of the Lord is my strength. I need to know that while I am dust and to dust I shall return that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor mind conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.

Here in this penitential time, let me praise my Maker while I've breath and when my eyes shall close in death how to still let praise flow from my very being.

Give me Jesus. As the writer of Hebrews 12:2 says, *Let us fix our eyes on him, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him, endured the cross, scorning its shame.* The Jesus I want to know is the joyful Jesus. Do you know him? Are you acquainted with him?

**The Jesus I want to know is a RESOURCEFUL JESUS.** Here at the wedding, the wine runs out. You know this story. You learned it in Sunday School, in Disciple Bible Study. John is the only one who bothers to tell it. It's a strange sort of miracle of Jesus; it's not a tragedy that he is taking care of. It's just an embarrassment that He's trying to cover. But here He is. There is a wedding going on and the wine runs out; the jugs are empty; the guests are thirsty. How embarrassing and how disturbing and how confusing.

Don't be too hard on the hosts. After all this is a Middle Eastern wedding. This is no 30-minute service with a two-hour reception. This is a full week of festivities. People are coming from near and far. Nobody bothers to make a reservation. They just all show up. Jesus and his disciples just show up at this place. Picture Tevye from Fiddler on the Roof being the host at this party and going out in the back yard and talking to the Lord about being blessed by people from miles around. "I know I should be happy that all these people came, but couldn't you at least have given me a fair warning? I know, I should have raised more grapes so I would have had more wine." You get the idea. Don't be too hard on the host; he had no idea how many people were coming.

Don't be too hard on Jesus who appears less than anxious to get involved. He's rather flippant with his mother here, sort of brushes her off in this story. "*Dear woman, why do you involve me?*" says Jesus to Mary. Jesus is a guest. It's not his party. Jesus is not a control freak. He doesn't have to waltz in unannounced and make everything all right. He stands at the door and knocks as any good

guest should do. So He's not extremely anxious to get involved. In spite of the host's miscalculations, and regardless of Jesus' reluctance, the wine jugs are empty and the guests are getting restless.

Empty — does that word have a familiar ring? Have you ever felt empty? Have you ever felt spiritually, emotionally, physically empty? You know what I'm talking about. Some of you have been there. We don't talk much about our discontentment with life, but it shows. We grumble, we get angry at small things, we eat too much, we drink too much, we drive too fast. We are uneasy. We are restless. We are empty. Empty leaves us feeling separated from God, unable to cope, confused about priorities and generally exhausted. We can't keep going on empty. Sooner or later something has got to happen.

I guess the question is, have we the faith of Mary to give our emptiness to the Lord? *His mother said to the servant, "Do whatever he tells you to do."* Have we that kind of faith?

About 80 years ago, a Kentuckian by the name of Thomas Chisholm wrote one of America's favorite hymns. Even though some of you may question that anything good can come from Kentucky, Thomas Chisholm gave us the hymn "Great is Thy Faithfulness." Do you remember the second line of the refrain of that great hymn? "All I have needed Thy hand hath provided. Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me." In turning water into wine, Jesus demonstrated his faithfulness. In that hymn, Chisholm suggests some ways Jesus demonstrates his faithfulness to us.

Pardon for Sin — You see it's one thing to sit in sackcloth and ashes feeling sorry for our sins. It is another thing in the name of Jesus Christ to be forgiven. Today your sins can be washed away. Your record can be purged of wrong. You can be set free. If that truth ever got down to our toes it would set our feet to dancing.

Peace that Endures — Peace that the world doesn't understand. I hope you read the Gospel of John during this Lenten season and if you read far enough over in the 14th chapter you'll run into a phrase that Jesus says to his troubled disciples on the eve of his departure. He says *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you, not as the world gives give I to you. Let not your hearts be troubled neither let them be afraid.*" Have you run into the peace that passes all understanding? I don't care what's going on in your life. I don't care what struggles you're facing. Do you know what it is to have the peace that passes all understanding? That's what Jesus brings to you today. Peace like that will set your heart to dancing.

Remember the next phrase? "Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide" Here He comes with His own presence. Maybe we are troubled and need encouragement. Maybe we are grateful and just need someone to thank. Maybe we are weary in well doing, disappointed in trying. Jesus is always there. When you miss a step and mess up in life, He is the first one to pick you up and put you back on the dance floor. Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide. At life's

most embarrassing moments — Jesus comes. That’s the Jesus I want to know.

**The Jesus I want to know is an ABUNDANT JESUS.** Remember the end of the story. Verse 10 — *The master of the banquet, tasting the new wine, calls the bridegroom aside and says, “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.”*

Isn’t that just like Jesus — giving us more than we ask or think? When He feeds the 5,000 with a poor boy’s lunch there are 12 baskets full left over. Isn’t that just like Jesus? He just can’t do enough; he is abundant in what he has to offer. He keeps on giving. He turns water into wine, sinners into saints, fear into courage, sorrow into joy, defeat into victory, despair into hope, death into life. John 10:10 says, *I am come that you may have life, and have it abundantly.* That’s the Jesus I want to know.

When I look at my life there are four simple words that describe it — better than I deserve. I can sum it all up in those four words. When I consider the opportunities for ministry that have been mine at the places I have served I simply exclaim — better than I deserve. When I think about the friendships I have formed through the years that stretch literally all around this world, the community that we have with other people, it’s better than I deserve. When I think about the forgiving spirit people extend to me when I slip and fall and the willingness of people to offer me another chance when I drop the ball — I know that it is better than I deserve.

That’s what makes grace so amazing. It’s better than we deserve. If such grace has brought us safe this far, is it not sufficient to get us all the way home? If you want to give up something for Lent, give up something that is going to make you a better person. Do something that’s going to change your life. If you give up chocolate, you’ll probably backslide by Valentine’s Day; don’t give up dessert, you’re going to think about it every day and you will be back eating it by Easter.

Instead, put off something that is hurting you and others. Give up gossip for 40 days. The next time someone says “Have you heard?” say “No, I haven’t heard and I don’t want to hear from you.” If you want to do something for 40 days that’s going to make a difference in life, stop being critical for 40 days and start being positive. If you want to do something constructive for 40 days, reach down in your soul where there is bitterness and unforgiveness and ask the Lord to wash your bitterness away. If you want to do something vital for Lent, do something that is going to make a difference in your life.

What if —

Bible reading was no longer a religious chore but a spiritual feast,  
Worship was not a dull habit but a joyous celebration,  
You traded in your religion for a relationship with Jesus Christ.

So my prayer this Lenten season is a simple one — Give me Jesus.

In the morning when I rise, give me Jesus.

And when I'm all alone, give me Jesus.

And when I come to die, give me Jesus.

You can have all this world, but give me Jesus.

When I learn that Jesus is all I need, I will be set free to live life in all of its glory.

Do you know my Jesus? Would you like to know Him better?

Amen.













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