

THE TABLE AT CANA

At the Table (Part 1) | John 2:1-11

The Table. In every culture and context – whether at home or at work, in politics or economics, in social circles and religious tradition -- there is always “The Table.” We are beholden to the people who set it. We often want a good seat at it. We tend to undervalue the people who serve at it. We have all sorts of manners and customs around it. Think of some of the tables in your life. What do you picture?

I picture the long dining room table I used to hide under when I was a kid, so I could hear what the adults were discussing. I think of the training table my college crew team sat at together to build our fellowship and physical strength. I imagine the kitchen table where Amy, I and our boys would light a candle and dine together all those years. There’s a table where our staff meets to pray and dream and try to solve problems. There’s a table in a friend’s basement where I’ll sit tomorrow, play Euchre, and hope to win. What are some of the significant tables in your life?

The Table matters. It’s the place where crucial conversations happen. It’s the spot where significant values are taught and important relationships are broken or deepened. Leonard Sweet – one of the brightest, most practical theologians I’ve met says: “*At the table, where food and stories are passed from one person to another and one generation to another, is where each of us learns who we are, where we come from, what we can be, to whom we belong, and to what we are called.*”¹

It shouldn’t surprise us, therefore, that Jesus did some of his most beautiful signs, his most timeless teaching, his greatest work in the lives of people, **AT THE TABLE**. So that’s what we’re going to explore together between now and Easter. We’re going to study seven striking scripture stories where Jesus did and said things at the table that can enrich our lives and give us practices that align us more with the beautiful life he called the kingdom of God.

And the first of those amazing encounters with Jesus was, of all places, at a wedding table. Listen to how the Apostle John tells the story: **²On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee** – a village in the northern part of Israel to the west of the sea or lake called Galilee. Parenthetically, if you are at our Butterfield campus or in our Auditorium, I encourage you to someday visit the Sanctuary at our Oak Brook campus and come up and touch the huge stone that forms the top of our baptismal font. It’s held up by an olive tree stump from Israel, but the stone is from Cana in Galilee and was likely there when this story happened!

We also know that **Jesus’ mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.** Just out of curiosity, how many of you have ever been invited to a wedding or sat at a wedding table? HERE’S a photo I took at the wedding rehearsal dinner table before our son Cole was married to the amazing Heather DeBoer. That’s her mom to the left! We’d originally planned to hold that event at Ditka’s, but we ended up there in our living room and dining room. I hope you like the Hogwarts/Harry

Potter look! And THAT picture there is the head table at the wedding reception hosted at the lovely home of Amy and John DeBoer. Didn't the folks at Phillip's Flowers do a beautiful job with that? The original plan was to hold that reception at an historic banquet hall in Oak Park. And, then, THIS picture, well that one is at a cake-cutting table at a reception the DeBoer's and the Meyer's held in October for all the guests who couldn't come in January when the wedding was held. We held it in our GARAGE.

Why do you suppose the wedding rehearsal dinner was held in our living room instead of Ditka's? Why do you imagine the wedding reception was held at the DeBoer home instead of in Oak Park? Why do you figure we needed to hold a second reception ten months later? Why was the cake-cutting table in a garage? Because a global pandemic shut down Ditka's and the Oak Park reception hall. Because even months later, after careful planning, a torrential rain storm shut down our plans for a lovely garden party to celebrate the wedding with even more family and friends. Because sometimes, ***LIFE happens, when you've made other plans.***

That's the story of the wedding table at Cana, too. We don't know all the details of what happened at that wedding, but we know that it was marked by a calamity – a moment when *LIFE happened and the hosts had other plans.*

Like today, though maybe even more so, weddings were really significant affairs. They typically went on for a week. They involved people from the whole town. In an era when you didn't put your money into automobiles or technology or country clubs or vacations, putting on a really great WEDDING was one of the main ways you expressed love for your kids, and lavished kindness on your people, and bolstered your reputation as a person with whom people would want to hang out or do business. Long, fun weddings were very important. You get this?

So, imagine the look on the face of the Father of the Bride that day, when the steward walks up to him as he's talking and laughing at the Parents' Table and whispers in his ear: "*Sir, we're out of wine.*" This is worse than a pandemic shrinking the size of our guest list. This is worse than COVID shutting down the restaurants and reception halls on which we'd planned. This is way worse than a rainstorm forcing us to move the party into the garage. This is a catastrophe spelled O-U-T – "out." *We're out of wine?*

I don't know who passed on the news to her. Maybe it was the mother of the bride or groom who went to her because she was just one of those people you feel safe with when life is messing with you. But while everybody is still reveling, someone came up to some Guest Table and told Mary. And the Bible says: **³When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."**

Now, there are all kinds of reactions Jesus could have had to this news. He could have stormed up to the Bridegroom and said: *What? Did you fail to plan for all these people? Did you let too many people in? Are you skimping on the hospitality? Did you hire the wrong wine supplier? Do you not get how important this wedding is to your reputation and future? Do you not care that we traveled all the way here from Nazareth and now have nothing to*

drink?" This is the way many people respond to disappointment. They pile guilt or shame on others.

I once read of a woman who received news that one of her parents had died. Her response was: *"Good. Now there's one less pair of eyes to judge me."* That's sad, isn't it? Can you imagine how much guilting and shaming must have happened at that Family Table? But Jesus does not do any of that. Why? Because Jesus came to rescue people from their guilt over things they do wrong. He came to deliver us from our shame over problems we don't know how to fix or can't seem to control. Jesus is the Savior we all need. You are safe **at the table** with Him.

I have only a limited time today, so I apologize that I can't walk you through all of the meaningful dialogue that happen next. I'll do that another time. Suffice it to say that the text says that **⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. 180 gallons in all. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. ⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." He's the person the family's hired to coordinate the feast. They did so. ⁹ 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.** Side note: In the kingdom of God, it's not the human "Masters" who know everything. It's more like *Downton Abbey*. It's the servants who see and understand most. **Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ 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."**

And then John concludes the story like this:¹¹ **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.** You see, the miracle Jesus did at the wedding table of Cana was a wonderful act in itself, but also a signpost. It was pointing toward a day when the world's hope had run out and humanity would be left with nothing but guilt and shame. Until Jesus came and poured out the spiritual equivalent of 180 gallons of premium red grace. Jesus did a lot of gracious things during his earthly life, but he **saved the best** till Good Friday – the place where our Lenten journey is heading.

In days ahead, you will find yourself **at the table** someplace with someone who has run out of something they really need. It may be their fault or it might just be because LIFE happened to them and they hadn't planned for it. Maybe they've run out of patience or hope. Maybe they've run out of ideas for how to get themselves out of a mess. Maybe they've run out of money or friends. Maybe they're run out of time or energy to do what needs doing. What would it look like for you to be their signpost toward Jesus. What if you were one of the abnormal people one who doesn't pile on guilt or shame or ignore their problem and just move on? What would it look like for you to surprise somebody in trouble with 180 gallons of premium grace -- so that they are moved to wonder: *"Wow. I thought I was out... I thought I was finished... But, what you've done is so much more than others do. God, through you, saved the best till now."*

PIC 1



PIC 2



PIC 3



¹ Leonard Sweet, *Tablet to Table: Where Community is Found and Identity is Formed*