

Living the Fruitful Life: 4. The Best Wine

John 2:1-10

November 24, 2019

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This morning, we conclude this series on Living a Fruitful Life in which we have been looking at the biblical metaphors of vines, vineyards, and wine as a way of understanding the Christian life. We began three weeks ago by looking at the kind of conditions necessary to grow vines. We toured a local vineyard and learned about the importance of the soil, and how the vines had been planted on a slope facing the south in order to give the vines more sunlight, and then by planting the vineyard beside Lake Waconia – the lake effect added a few more growing days to the season. What appeared to me as a scenic spot was actually strategically selected to offer the best conditions possible. We looked at Isaiah 5 where Isaiah tells us that we are the vineyard and we were created to bear good fruit. We considered the kinds of conditions in our lives necessary to bear good fruit.

On Thursday morning, I participated in the Interfaith Outreach prayer breakfast that gave thanks for the power of community that brought forth Interfaith Outreach forty years ago. Interfaith is in the middle of a sleep-out campaign to raise \$2.6 million to prevent homelessness in this community in 2020. The first sleepout campaign raised just \$7,000. Over the years, more than \$30 million has been raised, preventing more than 33,000 persons from being homeless – that's almost enough people to fill the entire Target Field. That's bearing fruit, but it does not happen unless we pay attention to the right conditions that will produce good fruit.

Two weeks ago, we looking at pruning. A vine sends out several shoots but not every shoot will produce fruit. So by pruning away some of the shoots, the vine is able to focus its energy and resources on bearing good grapes. Jesus said, **"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit."** And what fruit are we to produce? Love. And sometimes we must prune away those things in our lives that are consuming time and energy but not leading us to the fruit that Jesus says we were designed to produce.

Last week, we looked at the joy of the harvest and how the efforts of an entire year culminate in the harvest. Love is the fruit that we are called to produce – the kind of love that is selfless giving. So, I shared this photo from my week of service in Puerto Rico and the joy our team experienced in this harvest experience. We looked to Jesus and when he saw the crowds, he had compassion. When he saw how they were hurting, he responded. Jesus calls us to go into the fields and harvest. And so I invited us to see how our financial resources are able to bring forth a harvest.

After the harvest, some grapes are eaten, some are dried to become raisins, but most grapes become wine. In our visit to the vineyard, here's what we learned about that. [video] The word, wine, appears 296 times in the Bible. In the Old Testament, it sometimes appears as a metaphor for God's judgment – we are the grapes and God is stomping on us. Sometimes the words appears as a prohibition against drunkenness. But mostly, the references to wine are positive. And the best wine represented the good life. And that's the story we find in John's gospel where Jesus turns water into wine.

To fully understand what John is saying, it's important to know that John is writing at two levels. There is the surface level of what's happening, but there is also a deeper level where John provides clues to who Jesus is and the impact he can have on your life. In John, whenever

Jesus does a miracle, John call it a miraculous sign – pointing to something deeper. The first miraculous sign happens at a wedding.

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Already, John gives us clues. What else in Jesus' life happens on the third day – the resurrection, Jesus raised from the dead. **...there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee.** In the first century, a wedding usually lasted an entire week. Jesus missed the first couple of days and arrives on the third day. **Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration.** The fact that his mother, Mary, was there may be an indication that this wedding was for a relative. And when Jesus and his disciples arrive, his mother tells him that they've run out of wine. There is nothing to drink and there's still another four days of the wedding. And Jesus replies **Woman, what does that have to do with me? My time hasn't come yet.** There's an edge to his response. Mom, what do you want me to do? I'm not the wine distributor. She's not looking for a miracle. At this point, Jesus has never done a miracle. Turn water into wine? Nobody has ever done that. I think she's saying, go down to the liquor store, buy some wine, bring it back – and hurry! His mother tells the servants, **Do whatever he tells you.**" That's a clue for us. Who are the servants? You and me. Do whatever he tells you. Do whatever he tells you and you will find yourself in the middle of something remarkable. That was my Puerto Rico experience that I shared last week. When I was first invited to make the trip, I had a long list of reasons not to go, but in the end I felt God was asking me to go. The first night we were in San Juan, each person shared what we were hoping for during the week, and I shared that I was hoping for a story. Throughout the week, I kept listening, hoping there might be a story – some realization that God was at work in what we were doing. And it wasn't until a few minutes before I left our worksite for the final time that it hit my heart – not until the homeowner, Vivian, looked at what had been done and she said through her tears: "My house is now your house. You will always be welcome here." That moment will stay with me the rest of my life. And I almost missed in my list of excuses. Do whatever he tells you. Are we listening? Are we paying attention? **Nearby were six stone water jars used for the Jewish cleansing ritual, each able to hold about twenty or thirty gallons.** John wants us to know these are not clay jars but stone jars – six of them – each able to hold up to 30 gallons – jars used for the ritual of purification – spiritual cleansing when they would pour water over their bodies before approaching God. **Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water," and they filled them to the brim.** I sense these jars no longer represent the purification ritual, but they represent us. Have you ever been filled to the brim – so full that you thought you would explode. Have I told you about my grandson? This was last week – every time I see him, it's like my heart is ready to explode. Joy does that. **Jesus told them, "Now draw some from them and take it to the headwaiter," and they did. The headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine.** This is amazing. He can't hardly believe it. And he calls to the groom **"Everyone serves the good wine first. They bring out the second-rate wine only when the guests are drinking freely. You kept the good wine until now."** The good wine is when Jesus takes what's ordinary, fills it to the brim and brings joy. This is not really a story about a wedding but it's a story about the life Jesus wants to give you. And that life is characterized by hope, peace, joy, and love. The wine in this story is the saving gift of Jesus Christ offered once again for you.

How do you access this new wine? That's what we offer every time we share in communion. God wants to make a connection with you. We are invited to step into Jesus' life. In the first Century, many thought that wine was made possible by the wine God, Dionysus or Bacchus. Serve Bacchus and it's eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die. What does earthly pleasure in excess look like? Addiction. We can be drawn into earthly pleasures and end up slaves to them. But Jesus offers something else, a different kind of life that never runs out.

In the Last Supper, the disciples show up expecting a Seder meal – a remembrance of the Passover instituted 1200 years earlier when the Israelites left captivity in Egypt. Each year, they would gather to remember that their people were once slaves but now they were free. And everything in that meal was meant to remind them of that time – there was wine, unleavened bread, salty water, bitter herbs, and lamb – and as you ate those foods you would remember that you are no longer slaves but free. That’s why the disciples were there that night. But Jesus knows he will be arrested that night – that his death is coming, that this would be their last supper. So at the end of the meal, Jesus takes bread and says, “Listen carefully – from now on, this is my body, given for you. I want you to remember this.” And after the meal, he took a cup of wine, and said, “This is now the blood of the new covenant poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.” The wine is now a symbol of Jesus’ life poured out for us, to deliver us – and he says, “Do this in remembrance of me.” This wasn’t just once a year or even once a month, but every time you break bread and drink wine, remember me. So, whether it is here in this moment or at home or at a restaurant – whenever you break the bread and drink from the cup, it is a moment to pause and remember that Jesus is the source of life, and when I let him into my life, he is the true bread of life and when I drink wine I remember that I abide in him and he in me. In him, my life is worth living.

With Thanksgiving approaching, I remembered a Thanksgiving that we shared with our daughters in 2007. When they decided to go off to college on the east coast, we told them that we would only be able to bring them home for Christmas and for summer – and not for Thanksgiving. But after a couple of Thanksgivings without them, we decided to meet up with them for Thanksgiving in New York City. And we had a wonderful time together. We saw the Macy’s parade and the night before the parade, all of the balloons are in a staging area where we could see them being inflated. On Thanksgiving we saw the parade. And we had our Thanksgiving feast at a soul food restaurant in Harlem with Amanda’s aunt and cousin. But I think for me, the best part was when we walked out to Battery Park that looks out toward the Statue of Liberty and with my two daughters beside me, I remember thinking – this is the good life – and knowing the next day they would head back to school and Amanda and I would come home - I said to them remember that I love you. There is nothing that I would not do for you. I will always love you.

And I think that’s what Jesus was trying to say at the Last Supper. Take this bread and this wine and when I’m gone, remember me. Remember that I love you so much that I laid down my life for you. Remember there is a life filled with goodness and joy. Remember that I have the power to take the ordinary and mundane and transform you into something that fills you to the brim. Remember that I will be with you always and will never stop loving you. Remember me.

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of November 24, 2019

Weekly Prayer: Dear Jesus, you have come among us working wonders and signs of God’s miraculous abundance. You can change the ordinary waters of our lives into the finest of wines. Open our hearts and minds to the abundance that you offer so that your overflowing grace may be at work around us and within us. In your name we pray. Amen.

Monday, November 25

Scripture: John 2:1-11

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. When the wine ran out, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They don’t have any wine.” Jesus replied, “Woman, what does that have to do with me?”

My time hasn't come yet." His mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby were six stone water jars used for the Jewish cleansing ritual, each able to hold about twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water," and they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some from them and take it to the headwaiter," and they did. The headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine. He didn't know where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. The headwaiter called the groom and said, "Everyone serves the good wine first. They bring out the second-rate wine only when the guests are drinking freely. You kept the good wine until now." This was the first miraculous sign that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

Don't Forget: If you're a Messiah member who was not able to turn in a 2020 giving commitment card in worship the last two Sundays, it will help us a lot to hear from you. You can [click here](#) to print out a commitment card to return or email to lching@messiahchurch.org. Help us know how to plan—and thank you!

Observation: John includes in this story many clues about Jesus and what it means to follow Jesus. Why does John tell us the jars were used for Jewish rites of purification? He could have said simply, 'There were six stone jars.' It's because John's story is not just about Jesus changing water into wine, but it is instead about how life in Christ is richer and more joyful than the ritualistic religion of first-century Judaism.

Application: John pointedly noted that Jesus changed water in jars used for ritual purification (verse 6) into "good wine" (verse 10). It was a sign that he offered a better way than his day's rigid, repressive ritual system. Did you, in your growing up years or later, ever experience faith as rigid and repressive, draining life of joy and satisfaction? When has Jesus changed "water into wine" in your spiritual walk?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, fill me to the brim with the joyous, freeing quality of life you came to offer us. I want to do as your mother told the servants to do and do whatever you tell me. Amen.

Tuesday, November 26

Scripture: Psalm 67:1-7

Let God grant us grace and bless us; let God make his face shine on us, *Selah* so that your way becomes known on earth, so that your salvation becomes known among all the nations. Let the people thank you, God! Let all the people thank you! Let the people celebrate and shout with joy because you judge the nations fairly and guide all nations on the earth. *Selah* Let the people thank you, God! Let all the people thank you! The earth has yielded its harvest. God blesses us—our God blesses us! Let God continue to bless us; let the far ends of the earth honor him.

Observation: At the start, this psalm sounded like a generic expression of thanks to God. Not until verse 6 was the reason for gratitude specified: the vines and fields have produced a harvest. In the commentary, *Psalms for Everyone*: "A traditional society cannot assume that this year's harvest implies fruitfulness next year. There are no such guarantees.... [T]his year's blessing makes people pray more earnestly for next year's blessing. It will be an expression of God's grace, and it will issue from God's face beaming out to them" (p. 204).

Application: Tragedies like the terrible fires that have destroyed so much in California remind us that we, too, have no guarantee that our comforts and abundance will always continue uninterrupted. What ways have you learned to remind yourself to thank God for the good things in your life, rather than taking them for granted?

Prayer: Lord God, you are the ultimate source of all good things, and I thank you. Help me play my part in spreading that good news to the far ends of the earth. Amen.

Wednesday, November 27

Scripture: Ephesians 5:15-21

So be careful to live your life wisely, not foolishly. Take advantage of every opportunity because these are evil times. Because of this, don't be ignorant, but understand the Lord's will. Don't get drunk on wine, which produces depravity. Instead, be filled with the Spirit in the following ways: speak to each other with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs; sing and make music to the Lord in your hearts; always give thanks to God the Father for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ; and submit to each other out of respect for Christ.

Observation: In the ancient world, as today, some people tried to numb themselves against life's pains by drinking too much wine (as well, of course, as other substance-based and behavioral escape mechanisms). To Christians in the city of Ephesus, Paul wrote that psalms, hymns, spiritual songs, and always giving thanks to God were a better way.

Application: The Message paraphrased Paul's counsel in verses 18-19 with these words: "Drink the Spirit of God, huge draughts of him. Sing hymns instead of drinking songs!" Can gratitude to God be intoxicating, even habit-forming? Have you ever been in that condition, and if so, what was the experience like? What are some of the life benefits of having a gratitude habit?

Prayer: Lord God, thank you for the times when you did great things for me and for your people. Help me to live trusting that, sooner or later, you always act to lift us up and bring us joy. Amen.

Thursday, November 28

Scripture: Isaiah 25:6-9; 65:17-18, 21-25

On this mountain, the LORD of heavenly forces will prepare for all peoples a rich feast, a feast of choice wines, of select foods rich in flavor, of choice wines well refined. He will swallow up on this mountain the veil that is veiling all peoples, the shroud enshrouding all nations. He will swallow up death forever. The LORD God will wipe tears from every face; he will remove his people's disgrace from off the whole earth, for the LORD has spoken. They will say on that day, "Look! This is our God, for whom we have waited—and he has saved us. This is the LORD, for whom we have waited; let's be glad and rejoice in his salvation!"

Look! I'm creating a new heaven and a new earth: past events won't be remembered; they won't come to mind. Be glad and rejoice forever in what I'm creating, because I'm creating Jerusalem as a joy and her people as a source of gladness.

They will build houses and live in them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They won't build for others to live in, nor plant for others to eat. Like the days of a tree will be the days of my people; my chosen will make full use of their handiwork. They won't labor in vain, nor bear children to a world of horrors, because they will be people blessed by the LORD, they along with their descendants. Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear. Wolf and lamb will graze together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, but the snake—its food will be dust. They won't hurt or destroy at any place on my holy mountain, says the LORD.

Observation: The Messiah family wishes you and yours a blessed Thanksgiving Day. As Israel's story began, God promised Abraham, "All the families of the earth will be blessed because of you" (Genesis 12:3). The prophet Isaiah said when God was victorious, he would prepare "a rich feast"—that was how rulers marked victories. The great food and drink was just a symbolic appetizer. God promised to "swallow up death forever," and "wipe tears from every face." God's banquet would be for "all peoples," "all nations," "the whole earth."

Application: By Jesus' day, Israel's religious leaders loved the image of God's great banquet. Many were sure they alone would be the honored guests. They'd missed a crucial part of the vision. From the CEB Study Bible notes: "In one of many expansive visions in Isaiah, God is imagined preparing a banquet not just for the elders on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24), nor even for Judah, but for all the nations." What tempts you to limit your vision of God's "banquet" to just your own church, nation or ethnic group? How does your heart respond to God's expansive vision?

Prayer: Lord God, I do not want my walk with you limited to this time-bounded existence. Thank you for inviting me to participate in your eternal banquet. Amen.

Friday, November 29

Scripture: Luke 5:33-39

Some people said to Jesus, "The disciples of John fast often and pray frequently. The disciples of the Pharisees do the same, but your disciples are always eating and drinking." Jesus replied, "You can't make the wedding guests fast while the groom is with them, can you? The days will come when the groom will be taken from them, and then they will fast." Then he told them a parable. "No one tears a patch from a new garment to patch an old garment. Otherwise, the new garment would be ruined, and the new patch wouldn't match the old garment. Nobody pours new wine into old wineskins. If they did, the new wine would burst the wineskins, the wine would spill, and the wineskins would be ruined. Instead, new wine must be put into new wineskins. No one who drinks a well-aged wine wants new wine, but says, 'The well-aged wine is better.'"

Observation: Wine makers today have different, more durable containers. In Bible times, people employed animal skins, most often goatskins, as containers for fluids. Wine expands as it ferments; fermenting wine had already expanded old wineskins to their limit, so still-expanding new wine would rupture them. Jesus used the image to tell religious leaders who complained about him spending time with people they saw as "sinners" that his kingdom could not be contained or restrained by their rules and habits.

Application: In his commentary, William Barclay wrote: "'Don't,' says Jesus, 'let your mind become like an old wineskin. People say of wine, 'The old is better.' It may be at the moment, but they forget that it is a mistake to despise the new wine, for the day will come when it has matured and it will be best of all.' The passage is Jesus' condemnation of the shut mind and a plea that [people] should not reject new ideas." What helps you stay open to new ideas—not to blindly accept them, but not to reject them just because they're new either?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I thirst for your new wine with its life-giving properties. Do not let my thoughts and actions grow hardened and inflexible. Keep me open to whatever you want to do now. Amen.

Saturday, November 30

Scripture: Matthew 26:26-30

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take and eat. This is my body." He took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from this, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many so that their sins may be forgiven. I tell you, I won't drink wine again until that day when I drink it in a new way with you in my Father's kingdom." Then, after singing songs of praise, they went to the Mount of Olives.

Observation: Matthew, mainly following Mark's account in Mark 14:22-26, put few details in his account of the Last Supper. But anyone who knew the Jewish faith would have known that the last *hallel* (hymn of praise) Hebrews sang at Passover was Psalm 118. Hebrews 7:1-2 saw Jesus' action prefigured in the brief story in Genesis 14:14-20. In that story, Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought bread and wine to Abraham, and received a tithe from him.

Application: From Psalm 118:6, "The Lord is for me—I won't be afraid. What can anyone do to me?" Verse 17 said, "I won't die—no, I will live and declare what the Lord has done." How do you think those words strengthened Jesus as he sang them in the Upper Room just hours before his crucifixion? How do those words speak to any fears you carry in your heart? How did Jesus' use the fruit of the vine to symbolize all the joy and newness he will share with his people in a world made new? Have you made the heart commitment to be there to share the kingdom wine with Jesus?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, I'm grateful for the chances I have to take part in the communion service now. But how much more I will treasure it when I get to take it with you in your Father's kingdom. Amen.