



## Love Before Purity – Touchpoint for January 22, 2025

### John 2:1-12 (NRSVUE) The Wedding at Cana (Again)

TOUCH POINT

<sup>2</sup> On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup> Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup> When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” <sup>4</sup> And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come.” <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” <sup>6</sup> Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the person in charge of the banquet.” So, they took it. <sup>9</sup> When the person in charge tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), that person called the bridegroom <sup>10</sup> and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” <sup>11</sup> Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

<sup>12</sup> After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples, and they remained there a few days.

**Grace and peace to you from the Mystery in whom we live and move, and have our being.**

Last week, my touchpoint was on Jesus turning water into wine at the wedding celebration in Cana. The story revolved around Jesus using the stone jars filled with water reserved for ceremonial purification.

After the jars were filled to the brim, Jesus told the servants to take some to the bridegroom for tasting. The bridegroom said to Jesus, “We usually serve the best wine first, and when they’re all drunk, we switch to the cheap wine. You saved the best for last!”

I suggested that Jesus did not violate temple laws for purification, but fulfilled the purpose of the cleansing for entering the temple. Jesus showed that God is not separate from them, but ever-present, as God is with us now. Therefore, the water was used for the celebration of these two in marriage.

This morning, I listened to the gospel story again on the app *Pray as You Go*, an Ignatian-style reflection where we put ourselves into the story. I decided to linger a bit longer with John’s narrative this week. If I don’t, I’ll have to wait three years for this designated passage to come around again, according to the liturgical calendar! (That was Eric’s line.)

My imagination went to the families at the celebration, and I reflected on my own family. I thought about *our* families and about the family of humanity, and how often we place life’s rituals and traditions above the people they serve.

In the turning of water into wine, the Rabbi Jesus appears to be saying something very unique in his world of temple ritual. I hear him declaring that people come first. Love comes first. Our human family comes first.

Our rituals indeed serve a purpose, but they outlive their usefulness when it comes down to living in the reality of love and family. The demand for rituals and traditions as prerequisites can become an obstacle to intimacy with the divine—the sacred in all things, especially the intrinsic belonging of humanity to each other, the earth, and to God.

Once wedding guests arrive for a celebration, like the one at Cana, the work has already been completed, and all things are as they are. Once the people arrive, the event goes ‘live.’ People become the main reason for the event, not the venue or the rituals.

We see this in Jesus’s words concerning the practice of the Sabbath. He said, “Man was not made for the Sabbath; the Sabbath was made for man.” When love is the purpose, and not the means to the purpose, it rocks our theologies. Jesus did just that.

A more contemporary example is David Chase Linehan, the father of a dear friend of mine, Kathryn Linehan. David Linehan was a U.S. Navy Commander and was later appointed as an Administrative Law Judge in 1993 by President Gerald Ford. He was given a commendation from the American Bar Association as a whistleblower.

Prior to 1980, veterans with PTSD were routinely denied benefits, as PTSD was not recognized as a mental disorder. In 1980, when PTSD was finally given a place in the DSM-IV as a clinical diagnosis, things changed.

As part of the Social Security Administration, David oversaw the approval of benefits, which went from 14% to 80%. He advocated for the hardest-hit low-income communities. David came under severe scrutiny as the political climate was questioning all benefits across the board. The investigation of every case was relentless. He showed great courage advocating for the veterans amid fierce pushback.

This is what was said about David in a book called *SocialINSecurity: Confessions of a Social Security Judge*, dedicated to him by author Judge London Steverson:

“David Linehan did not believe that it was his job to balance the federal deficit by denying claimants their rightful benefits.”

David Linehan was a man who put the needs of veterans and their rightful benefits before the bottom line of deficit hawks. In Jesus’s case, it was the temple law hawks.

This decision by Jesus to use the ceremonial washing jars reserved for ritual had at its core the same understanding: love and humanity first.

What are the purposes of rituals? To create perfect people, who will be deputized as little God’s? To allow people with power and authority to serve as gatekeepers for spiritual matters? Or can rituals and traditions be contemplative practices for creating a receptive environment for the Spirit? When it is the former, I think they’ve lost their usefulness. When it is the latter, love purifies.

On a personal level, the misguided application of my rituals and traditions (ok, my OCD’s) often serves my own need to be right or in control. I know when this happens in my life. I become the morality cop on how things ought to be, and people become facilitators of my self-righteous motives. Too often, even in small matters.

Jesus served no one else but the will of the Father—not his own will, or the will of the ritual. Love came first. Like David Linehan, when it came to the decision of compassion versus deficit, there was no choice.

Jesus's mother understood this. Jesus had to have known he would violate temple law in the eyes of onlookers. Jesus may not have been ready for the possible consequences. His mother said love and compassion first. Mary told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

There appears to be no pushback from Jesus once Mary speaks to the servants. Perhaps he came to his senses and remembered the original purpose of the law: always Divine love first. What could be more loving than to witness together the union of two people in marriage? How about the joining of all people over one loving purpose?

Perhaps, however, we should have compassion on ourselves for wanting to maintain tangible rituals. After all, the theology of a punishing God will produce a ton of religious OCD's.

Fear of authority is frightening, and it takes courage to do what Jesus did. The push back on David Linehan was brutal and possibly the reason for his mysterious and untimely death. Sound familiar?

How can we apply this?

Maybe when the waters of our religious positions and traditions are disturbed by love's invitation for a new perspective or a change of heart, we allow our water to be turned to wine. Please invite me to that party!

Maybe if the purpose we do all things is to expand love and compassion as deserved by ourselves and others, the rituals themselves would take on more purpose, acknowledging the presence that is always with us.

For where the Spirit is, there is life; and where there is life, there is love; and where there is love, there is God; and where there is God, there is celebration.

And as often as we drink this cup, let us do this in remembrance of the preeminence of love.

**Amen**

## Opening Songs

### **Be Still**

(The London Fox Taizé Choir)

Be Still, know that I am God

### **Calm Me Lord**

(Margaret Rizza)

Calm me Lord as you calmed the storm.  
Still me Lord, keep me from harm.  
Let all the tumult within me cease.  
Enfold me Lord, in your peace.

### **Bible Passage**

(A passage takes us from one place to another)

### **Touchpoint**

(Where God's story touches our life story)

### **Dwell Among Us**

(Salt of the Sound)

Keep moving and living and breathing in us  
Keeping working and singing and speaking through us  
You dwell among us...  
With all this life I long to see, more of You and less of me  
Lord send Your spirit here to work in us

### **The Meal**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

(The Scottish Festival Singers)

### **Benediction**

### **Sevenfold Amen**

(The Emmanuel Quartet)

Amen