

**Notes for Children's Talk & Sermon Outline for
Sunday, 16 August 2020**

Children's Talk: The Lord Can Make Boring Things Fun

- Are you bored?
 - Even right now as you watch this?
 - Are you feeling bored and wishing there was something more fun to do?
 - And maybe feeling a bit annoyed at your parents for making you watch this?
- Maybe you're actually not feeling bored—maybe you're feeling good today—but let's talk a bit about what to do when you're feeling like nothing is fun or worth doing anymore.
- In the story that we're going to focus on today, Jesus and His disciples are at a wedding and the wine runs out.
- Have you tried drinking wine?
 - You probably don't like the taste of it very much but you might learn to like it more when you get older.
- Wine and other alcohol can be misused.
 - Some people drink too much of it and then do things that hurt themselves or hurt other people.
 - That's not good at all; we would want the wine to run out in that circumstance.
- But wine can also be a sign of celebration and fun.
 - People drink wine at a wedding to celebrate.
 - Or at a Christmas dinner with all the family or some other party.
 - In this story wine is a symbol of something good and happy.
- So maybe, instead of wine, you should think of some special drink that you only get to have on special occasions—times when people are having fun.
- In this story, the wine has run out and that can be a picture for when all the fun and the joy seem to have gone away.
 - Things may have been fun in the past but now all the fun is gone.
 - It's easy to feel that way during this lockdown.
 - It can feel like you've done all the fun things you can possibly think of to do at home and you're bored of them now.
 - It probably would be easier to have fun if you could go more places and see more people.
- It's not your fault if you sometimes feel like you're bored and all the fun and joy have gone away.
 - In the story the Lord somehow miraculously makes more wine.
 - Let's see how He does it.
- John 2:1-11 (Kempton Project Translation, modified)
 - ¹ And on the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² And both Jesus was invited and His disciples to the wedding. ³ And when the wine was lacking, the mother of Jesus says to Him, "They have no wine."
 - ⁴ Jesus says to her, "What is there to Me and to you, woman? My hour is not yet come."
 - ⁵ His mother says to those ministering, "Whatever He shall say to you, do it."
 - ⁶ And there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the purification of the Jews, containing two or three measures apiece. ⁷ Jesus says to them, "Fill the waterpots with water. And they filled them up to the top." ⁸ And He says to them, "Draw some out

now, and bring it to the chief of the feast.” And they brought it. ⁹ And when the chief of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but those ministering who drew the water knew), the chief of the feast calls the bridegroom, ¹⁰ and says to him, “Every man first puts out the good wine, and when they have had enough, then the lesser; you have kept the good wine until now.”

¹¹ This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory, and His disciples believed in Him.

- There are so many cool details in this story.
 - If you're interested in hearing more about more of the details you could stick around to watch the adult sermon.
 - But the part I want to focus on for you guys is when the water becomes wine.
 - The story doesn't exactly say exactly when the water became wine.
 - Was all the water in all the six pots made into wine?
 - In other stories of food being miraculously produced it happens as the food is shared around or as the food is taken out of its container to be used.
 - So it seems likely that the water turned into wine as it was being drawn out of the pot.
- The lesson in this seems to be that it will be as we are *using* something that we know, that's when it will become something new and exciting that can bring joy.
 - It might seem boring at first when we're just thinking about it.
 - That's like thinking about water.
 - If your dad said to you, “Hey, guess what we're having to drink? Water!!!!” you would probably be confused and annoyed.
 - Water is good to have when you're really thirsty but it's not exactly exciting.
 - Water is symbolic of natural truth—things that we know.
 - You know that you're supposed to love the Lord and love the neighbour.
 - You know that you're supposed to keep the 10 Commandments.
 - Those aren't particularly exciting.
 - In a similar way, when we're feeling bored and like nothing is fun, we can feel like every suggestion of something to do is also boring.
 - “Uhhhh!!! I don't want to do that!”
 - But that's when it's still just water.
 - When you *use* it, the Lord can make it into something more.
- The next time you're feeling bored and like everything is stupid—and that might be 5 minutes from now—then think about something the Lord teaches about how to be useful.
 - What can you do for other people in your house?
 - Your mom, your dad, your sister, your brother?
 - You could even ask, “Is there anything that I can do for you?”
 - Or, “Is there anything that would be fun for you that I could do?”
 - Notice that the idea of doing that thing might seem pretty boring, but try doing it anyway.
 - Or you could think a bit bigger—what could you do that would make things better for people not in your house?
 - Your granny or grandpa or friend.
 - What could you do for people at school that would be fun for them?
 - What can you do for poor people?

- You could have a conversation with your mom or dad, “What can we do as a family to help other people?”
- Things are hard and it might be that you’ll try something and it won’t go how you wanted it to go and that will feel even harder than not trying at all.
 - But sometimes I think you’ll also find that when you *do* something with an idea that might seem boring at first, the Lord can make it into something that brings fun and enjoyment to you and other people.
- *Amen.*

Relationships, Part 1: When the Wine Runs Out

A Sermon by Pastor Malcolm G. Smith
16 August 2020

Intro

- The title of this sermon is “When the Wine Runs Out”.
 - Due to the lockdown restrictions on the sale of alcohol, the wine and other alcohol at your house may literally have run out in the last few weeks.
 - With the announcement last night you’ll be able to restock, legally, soon.
- But in this sermon we’re going to be talking about when the wine runs out as symbolic of those times when the fun and excitement and joy have run out in our relationships.
 - I’m going to be focussing on marriage examples but this is a situation that can happen in any relationships—as a parent with your child, as a child with your parent, with a friend, a work colleague.
 - The wine can run out in any of those relationships.
- I do want to mention that this way of looking at this story is not the primary New Church reading of it.
- The couple of passages in the teachings of the New Church that comment on this passage are primarily speaking about it in the way it represents the Lord’s work to take the external teachings of the Jewish church and miraculously fulfil them and transform them into new and deeper spiritual truths (see *Apocalypse Explained* §376:29).
 - That’s the primary way of understanding this story.
- But, as with anything from the Lord’s Word, there are many useful ways of looking at this story and I think reading a story about a wedding with a focus on its relevance to marriage and relationships is a fair way of approaching it.
- And in scripture there does seem to be a connection between wine and joy.
 - There are plenty of times when wine is talked about in a negative context but we also find passages like this from the Psalms:
 - Psalm 104:14-15 (NKJV)
 - ¹⁴ He causes the grass to grow for the cattle,
And vegetation for the service of man,
That he may bring forth food from the earth,
 - ¹⁵ And wine that makes glad the heart of man,
Oil to make his face shine,
And bread which strengthens man’s heart.
 - And there are also connections in scripture between wine failing and joy ceasing.
 - Isaiah 24:7-8 (NKJV)
 - ⁷ The new wine fails, the vine languishes,
All the merry-hearted sigh.
 - ⁸ The mirth of the tambourine ceases,
The noise of the jubilant ends,
The joy of the harp ceases.
- So it seems like there’s justification for using a story about wine at a wedding to talk about when joy ceases in a relationship and how it can miraculously be replenished by the Lord.

Why Did the Wine Run Out?

- A first question that's worth asking is why did the wine run out?
- There is a whole chapter in the book *Married Love* from the teachings of the New Church on "Reasons in Marriage for Cold States, Separation and Divorce" (see §234ff).
 - One of the things that it highlights is that there are many different causes of cold and many different categories of coldness in marriage—incidental and external causes of cold, to internal causes of cold, all the way to the cold caused by infidelity that can justify divorce.
 - I'm not going to go through all of that in this sermon so I recommend that you read it for a thorough understanding of this topic and I also want to acknowledge that I'll be talking about the less extreme causes of cold and if you're dealing with more extreme circumstances, then what we're talking about here may be less relevant.
- In the story we can assume that the people who planned the wedding thought that they had gathered enough wine to last through the whole wedding celebration.
- And this pattern of having enough at the beginning but then running out seems to relate to how there can be seemingly no shortage of love and positive feelings in the beginning of a relationship and so it can feel like that's never going to change but, with time, after the "honeymoon phase" those positive feelings can start to run out.
- The Rev. Erik Buss writes about this in his book *One Heart: Finding True Happiness in Marriage*:
 - Nobody expected to run out of wine in the wedding, or they would have acquired more. Nobody expects to run short of the wisdom required to succeed in marriage, but everyone does. How marvelous, then, that the Lord is with us, waiting for us to realize our need, and then offering us basic truths from His Word that He can use to transform us into spiritual people. Success and joy in marriage come from our willingness to learn and live the basic spiritual principles of the Word. (p.234)
- External circumstances can also play a role.
- I was talking to a couple earlier this week about how this lockdown situation can start to feel like we should be grateful for all that we have and glad to have work and our health but the days and weeks can start to all blend together where we've done all the things that we can think of to do and each day and each week feel like more of the same monotonous pattern.
 - And we don't know when it will ever end.
- And that's just one level of it.
 - There's an additional level of feeling disconnected from the people that we care about.
 - And plenty to feel anxious about with the virus and the economic and political circumstances.
- There's stress from having too much work to do or stress from not having any or enough things to keep you busy.
- All of those external circumstances are real and external stresses do affect our relationships and make certain things that would normally be easy a lot harder.
- And all of that stress and anxiety from other sources can easily end up being directed towards our partner or children, by being reactive, quick to find fault, dismissive, or sarcastic.
- Under these difficult external circumstances, we all attempt to cope in different ways and unhealthy and dysfunctional things can very easily start or things that were already there can be exacerbated and made worse by the difficult circumstances.

- With so much that feels out of our control, the need to control the people around us can easily flare up in us and lead to hurt and conflict.
- We're talking about wine as symbolic of good things in this story but, obviously, substance abuse can take a real toll on relationships.
 - With so much that feels bad going on, we can just want something that feels good—be that alcohol, drugs, sugar, food, pornography, other obsessions.
 - To varying degrees and in varying ways those behaviours can negatively impact our relationships.
- A more mild example is just having too many things pulling our brains a million different directions.
 - I watched a really useful sermon by the Rev. Mark Pendleton titled, “Marital Multitasking and Undivided Love” (<https://youtu.be/sAuo5IN1Z0w>).
 - In that sermon the minister quoted this passage from the book *Married Love* that talks about why married love cools down in a marriage.
 - *Married Love* §147
 - Married love is purified and refined according to a person's renunciation of promiscuity.... The reason for this is that married love cools as soon as it becomes divided, and the growing coldness causes it to die, it being the heat of unchaste love that kills it. When the warmth of married love displaces and casts out the heat of promiscuous love, therefore, married love begins to grow pleasantly warm and, from a sensation of its delights, to bud and blossom, like an orchard or rose garden in springtime.
 - The primary point here is that if a person looks towards someone else than their partner that that immediately introduces the deathly cold of hellish love but, in the sermon, Mark drew attention to the phrase, “...married love cools as soon as it becomes divided....”
 - And he pointed out with many useful examples how easy it is for us to focus on other things than our partner and—surprise, surprise—people don't feel warmth and connection when they're not being paid attention to.
- I probably don't need to spend any more time on the problem—you all know that relationships can get cold and the joy can disappear—what's the solution? What can we do when we notice this happening?

Key People at the Wedding

- A key part of how the miracle occurs is *who* is at the wedding.
- It says that “the mother of Jesus was there” and Jesus and His disciples were invited (John 2:1-2).
 - That distinction is interesting—that Mary was already there and Jesus and His disciples were invited.

Mary Was Already There

- Mary seems to represent something on the affection and heart side of things.
 - When the angel Gabriel told her that she would give birth to the Jesus, her response was “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).

- It's comforting to know that something of that humble spirit—that simple love of doing what the Lord wants is already present in our relationships.
 - That gives me hope.
 - That even if things are feeling pretty cold and distant, somewhere inside me and inside the other person in the relationship is that Mary affection that wants to do what the Lord wants.
- And in the story it's Mary who alerts Jesus to the fact that the wine has run out.
 - This is the part of us that cares about the health of our relationship and is sensitive to the fact that things are not going in a good direction.
 - We can all sense this on some level but the teachings of the New Church say that, in a marriage, wives can be particularly sensitive and perceptive of the state of the marriage.
 - Wives might feel that things are off track sooner and more keenly than their husbands.
 - Wise husbands learn to pay attention to their wife's gut feel on these things.
- So Mary was already at the wedding but Jesus and the disciples were invited.

Jesus and His Disciples Were Invited

- I think the reason why it specifically mentions Jesus and His disciples being invited is because we need to consciously invite the Lord to be present in our relationships.
 - He wants to be there—He's standing at the door and knocking—but we have to invite Him to come in.
 - And, as a great, old New Church commentary on the Gospel of John observes,
 - “There are several instances recorded in the gospels of Jesus being invited to partake of his people's hospitality; and no instance is to be found of his refusing to become the guest even of the most humble or the most unworthy of his creatures.” (*Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John* by the Rev. William Bruce)
 - It doesn't matter how unworthy you might be or how messed up your relationship might be, if you invite Him, the Lord will be there.
 - And, because He's been invited, He can help when the wine runs out.

“Whatever He shall say to you, do it.”

- Mary tells Jesus, “They have no wine.”
 - And then Jesus says to her, “What is there to Me and to you, woman? My hour is not yet come.”
 - And there's lots to talk about there but we're just going to skip over it.
- Then Mary says to the servants, “Whatever He shall say to you, do it.”
 - She seems to be fully confident in the Lord's ability to solve this problem and in her instructions to the servants you can again hear that humble desire to do what the Lord wants.
 - And she relays that to the servants which seems to be a going from an affection in us towards taking action in the world.
- It also is reminiscent of things that Jesus later said to His disciples in this same Gospel.
 - John 15:12-14 (NKJV)
 - ¹² This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are My friends if you do whatever I command you.

- This is a perhaps obvious but crucial step in having our relationships be improved by the Lord:
 - We have to be willing to do things His way, to love other people in the way that He has loved us—willing to lay down our lives for our friends, children, and spouse.
 - We need to be willing to lay down our selfishness, our defensiveness, and our need to be right.
 - This laying down our life also speaks to a need to be vulnerable with the people that we love—to let them see our inner life, to see our fears and stresses, to let them see our beliefs that might not agree with theirs, to see our weaknesses and failings.
 - We're going to feel resistance to doing things the Lord's way—sometimes very strong resistance to the point of it feeling impossible to do it His way.
 - But the more resistant we are to doing things the Lord's way, the harder it's going to be for Him to help us.
- In the story the servants do do exactly what Jesus tells them to.

“Fill the waterpots with water.”

- Jesus' first instruction to them is, “Fill the waterpots with water” (7).
- We're told that “there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the purification of the Jews, containing two or three measures apiece” (6).
 - These were big waterpots—holding over 100 litres of liquid each.
 - And the servants do fill them, all the way up to the top.
- Filling waterpots is not exactly exciting work.
- I imagine that it might have taken the servants quite a while to bring enough water to fill those massive pots.
 - They probably weren't empty at the beginning but, if just one of them could contain over 100 litres and there were 6 of them to fill up to the brim, then they probably had to move at least 100 litres of water.
- Repetitive, tiring, boring work.
 - But it's work that almost anyone could do and I think that that's part of the message.
 - We can all do the boring but useful work of treating our partner kindly—doing our share of the household tasks, listening to how their day was.
 - We should try to fulfil our duties and responsibilities all the way to the top.
 - And it will take work to do so—that's the symbolism of it being 6 pots not 7.
 - “Six days you shall labor and do all your work....” (Exodus 20:9) before the 7th day of the Sabbath and rest.
- There's a whole chapter in the book *Married Love* on “The Reasons Why An Appearance of Love, Friendship, and Good Will Are to Be Seen in Marriages” (see §271ff).
 - And it talks about how married partners who are quite different people on the inside can and should still treat each other in loving and friendly ways.
 - These outwardly loving and friendly actions can lead to reconciliation.
 - *Married Love* §289
 - [M]arried couples who for various reasons are discordant in mind, alternate between disagreement and trust, between estrangement and closeness, even between quarrelling and making up or reconciliation. The appearance of friendship... brings about reconciliation.

- It's also significant that the waterpots were ones used for purification.
 - If we really want to have marriages that have heavenly warmth and peace and joy in them, then we have to prioritise cleaning up our act when it comes to anything that would pull us away from loving only our partner.
 - *Married Love* §71:1-2
 - [I]n the degree that a married person abstains from extra-marital affairs, even as regards the lusts of his will and his consequent intentions, in the same degree married love is purified in him and becomes progressively spiritual, first during his life on earth, and afterwards in heaven.
- No love can ever become pure in human beings, nor in angels. So neither can this love. But because the Lord primarily regards the intention that is in the will, therefore to the extent that a person has the intention and perseveres in it, to that extent he is introduced into the purity and holiness of this love, and gradually makes progress in it.
- I find that passage really hopeful.
 - And I think it relates to the Lord taking our efforts with water and turning them into something far more precious.

“Draw some out now....”

- After the servants fill all the pots to the top, then Jesus tells them, “Draw some out now, and bring it to the chief of the feast” and they do and it has become amazing wine.
- As we talked about in the Children’s Talk this seems to mean that it’s in the doing useful things and the sharing of things that the Lord can miraculously transform water into wine.
 - It’s when our intentions manifest in actual actions.
 - It’s when we actually find the words to say something to our partner that we’ve been thinking about for a while.
 - It’s when we follow through on our plan for how to connect with one of our kids.
- For myself, I’m asking the Lord to help me bring more intention, fun, and playfulness into my relationships.
 - I can do serious, I can do working hard, and I can do dutiful things but I need to remember that having fun is also really important.
- Try to get creative.
 - Have a dance party with your kids or turn on music and ask your partner to dance.
 - Take the time to make a nice meal and get dressed up before having the meal.
 - Take the time to write your spouse a handwritten love letter.
 - Write each of your children a letter about what you love about them.
- There are endless things that you can do, just like there would have been endless wine to draw forth from the waterpots, every time they came back to get more.
- Not all of our efforts will be successes or result in the outcomes that we’re hoping for but the Lord will be able to make some of them into something amazing.
 - The chief of the feast, or master of ceremonies, was amazed by the quality of the wine and said to the bridegroom, “Every man first puts out the good wine, and when they have had enough, then the lesser; you have kept the good wine until now” (10).
 - And that’s a good note to wrap things up on.

Conclusion: The Wine at the End is Better Than the Wine at the Beginning

- We think that the best times in a relationship are at the beginning—the falling in love phase, the “honeymoon phase”—but, in marriages with true married love, the best is yet to come.
- Married love and the married relationship can get sweeter and sweeter forever, just like fine wine that improves with age.
 - We don't have to try to regain our youth, we can instead enjoy a more mature kind of joy and excitement in our relationships.
 - And if you're not in a great relationship at the moment but are working to follow the Lord and be loving person, then the best is yet to come for you too.
- The Lord is constantly wanting to be invited into our relationships and He's working right now to take our efforts today to being loving and kind and transform them into something that brings us joy.
 - “This is the day the LORD has made;
We will rejoice and be glad in it” (Psalm 118:24)

- *Amen.*