

## Receiving the Lord's Life in Ours: Turning Water into Wine

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Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now, and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it. *John 2:7-8*

The miracle of water being turned into wine represents an event that can happen in each of our lives many times over. The Lord brought about an unexpected transformation that changed common, relatively uninteresting water into very fine wine. When we recognize from our heart what the Lord means by the truth that He has taught us, this miracle happens in our lives.

Water is wonderful stuff. On a hot day, it can be tremendously refreshing to drink a tall cool glass of water. Sometimes it is exactly what we want. Other times water isn't what we seek. I recall from my youth looking into the refrigerator, finding it empty of what I hoped for and calling out "There is nothing to drink." As in many households, it was not unheard of for the reply to be, "There lots of water in the faucet." Our response was, "But I want something **good** to drink."

It would seem rather unusual to invite guests over for a special social occasion and offer them nothing but water. Guests might feel like little attention or preparation had been made for their arrival. Having nothing but water would be a social blunder. In the first miracle recorded in the Gospel of John a related problem faced a family celebrating a wedding. With the festivities still going strong, they had run out of wine.

The wedding celebration in this story represents the church (*Apocalypse Explained* 376:29). This church is a quality that we have within our own lives and also refers to the church we share among us as a group of people who are dedicated to following the Lord. When it seems that all we have to drink is water, we don't understand what the Lord really means by the truth He seeks to teach us. All we know is what is called the truth of the external church (*ibid*). This can seem rather bland and every day.

In the story, the person who turned to the Lord for help when the wine ran out, was Mary, His mother. His response to her was formal. When He called her "Woman," He was using a term of solemn and respectful address. Mary had been His biological mother, but throughout His life, the Lord was gradually putting off all that He had received from her. His words, "What does your concern have to do with me?" may seem like a strong reproof, but it is probably better to think of them as reflecting the difference between natural priorities and spiritual ones. Mary, as the Lord's biological mother represents the life that comes naturally to us. Its concerns tend to be relatively short-term, relatively focused on self, and relatively worldly. There is little relationship between what it thinks is important and what the Lord is most concerned about. However, this is where we all must begin our spiritual journey. Some quality within our natural life recognizes that the Lord is the one who can help us and that we need to attend to what He says if we really want to have our life work well.

The Lord commanded that six huge waterpots of stone be filled by the servants with water. These pots would hold what is called two or three measures of water, with a measure being approximately equivalent to ten gallons. Filling these waterpots represents a person learning about the Lord, His commandments, His love, and the life of heaven. Their extremely large size probably should not be thought of as representing a person gaining a complex set of abstract doctrinal knowledge. Rather it represents a person learning many straightforward, practical ideas about the Lord, how He cares for us, and the life to which He calls us.

The waterpots were kept for rituals of purification. One of the very important uses of truth is to help us see how our daily thoughts and habits are different from what they could be. Without our conscious, deliberate effort to change, truth will always remain external facts within our memories.

When the pots were filled the Lord commanded that some of their contents be drawn out and taken to the master of the feast. This means putting knowledge to use. It means having what we have learned change what we do, what we say, even what we think. When we do this, asking the Lord to change what we love, an amazing miracle occurs within our lives. The knowledge or faith that we have produces a quality of goodness that had previously been unknown to us. It is a dramatic change accomplished in us by the Lord. In the story, the water had been changed into extremely fine wine--so fine, that it was better than the best wine that had previously been offered at the wedding celebration.

The master of the feast called the bridegroom and said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then that which is inferior; but you have kept the good wine until now." The first wine that was served at the wedding in Cana represents the religious life that arises from the confused and poorly-understood ideas about God and what He wants that exist in the world around us. The good wine produced by the Lord's miracle represents the life that the Lord intends for His New Church.

Notice the contrast of this miracle, which is the Lord's doing, with what we are taught about King David numbering the people of his kingdom.

Numbering the children of Israel was forbidden, because 'numbering' meant arranging and setting in order, and the children of Israel, and the tribes into which they had been divided, meant all the truths and forms of the good of faith and love in their entirety. And since the arrangement and setting of these in order belonged to the Lord alone and not to human beings, numbering them was a transgression like that committed by those who lay claim to the truths of faith and forms of the good of love as their own and to the arrangement and setting in order of them as their own doing. (*Arcana Caelestia* 10218:2)

A passage on a related idea states:

We should not put pressure on other people or play on their emotions to get them to corroborate truths that we know, but we should hear another person and take his answers as they are in himself. For when we put pressure on another or play on their emotions to get them to corroborate truths that we know, this causes the others not to think and speak

from themselves, but from our ideas. And when anyone thinks and speaks from another, the truths he has are thrown into disorder, and yet he is not amended, except in the case of one who is as yet ignorant of these truths. (*Arcana Caelestia* 9213:6)

If we are going to be the Church that the Lord wants, it is important that we not try to do His work. Turning water into wine was the Lord's work, not ours. And this means we will each view the essential truths and the good of the Church differently. This happens even in heaven. We read: "No one's good and truth are wholly like or the same as another's, since in heaven, as in the world, there is endless variety (*Heaven and Hell* 231).

What are the fundamental qualities that the Lord intends for the New Church? We know that the quality of the church with us in this world forms the basis for the quality of eternal life for us after death. What are the key qualities of heavenly life? Heavenly life is one of active use. It is an extremely happy and joyful place. In heaven, the Lord is constantly in the minds of the angels--represented by the fact that no matter which way they turn the Lord as the sun of heaven is always before their eyes. Heaven is not a place where duty and strong self-compulsion to do unpleasant seeming actions exists. Nevertheless heavenly life is filled with angels doing good and useful things. The angels get to do what they want to do all the time. They want to serve the Lord. They want to be helpful to others. Heaven is continuous source of happiness and blessing to those who have accepted its life.

How well do we find these qualities represented by the church in our own lives and the church that exists among us? Think of the life of this congregation. How well have we done at forming the culture or habits of thought and life that are intended for the New Church?

One of the things that I believe we as a group of people have best understood is the concept of being useful and the joy that can come from service. Over the past year many people have given time to help others in events large and small. The people who participated in helping these acts of service to be successful certainly had other things they could have been doing with the time and energy they gave to these projects. But I expect that the majority of people who helped did not do so with a continuous sense of mild resentment that some of their own priorities and needs were displaced by the time they gave to a church effort. We know that working together on useful things can bring a wonderful sense of fulfillment.

One of the qualities of much of the world around us is a considerable ignorance about the Lord, or even worse some powerful false ideas about Him. The teachings for the New Church many times over refer to the absolute importance of us being conjoined to the Lord. Conjoined is not a word that exists in most dictionaries. It refers to a powerful relationship of love that a person can have with the Lord. It is not an intellectual acknowledgement of facts about Him. Unless we have established a personal relationship with Him, the teachings for the New Church say that we will not really understand anything of truth. Listen to the following words from the *True Christian Religion*.

The Lord is present with every person, urging and pressing to be received; and His first coming, which is called the dawn, is when an individual receives Him, which he does when he acknowledges Him as his God, Creator, Redeemer, and Savior. From this time

the person's understanding begins to be enlightened in spiritual things, and to advance into a more and more interior wisdom; and as he receives this wisdom from the Lord, he advances through morning into day, and this day lasts with him into old age, even to death; and after death he passes into heaven to the Lord Himself; and there, although he died an old man, he is restored to the morning of his life, and the rudiments of the wisdom implanted in him in the natural world grow to eternity. (*True Christian Religion* 766)

Some of the false ideas of God that we would want to reject are, on the one side, that of a distant and austere God, of a wrathful and judgmental God, and on the other side, of a God who will bless us with happiness no matter how self-centered and worldly we live our lives. The person who would be part of the New Church is called to conjunction with the Lord. We are called to a close relationship of love with Him. We must turn ourselves to Him, learn more about Him, follow Him and gradually come to feel His love and care as it really is.

Another quality that we can hope to build every more strongly within our church is a measure of wisely wishing well to each other, young and old, those who think like we do and those who think differently. And with this quality comes a measure of happiness that is unmistakable, powerful and extremely desirable.

Perhaps one of the reasons why the New Church is as small as it is, is because we are still in such a rudimentary stage of forming the ideas and life that are to define that Church. To the degree that its life is reflected in ours as a group, good people who come in contact with it will be drawn powerfully to that Church.

May we do our part to bring about the miraculous change of water into wine within our own lives and the life of this church. May that wine, which comes from all the good qualities supported by our understanding of what is true, help form a celebration of the Lord's life with His Church. May this celebration be powerfully reflected in all that we do, say, think and care about. AMEN

Lessons: 2 Samuel 24:1-4, 8-10, *John* 2:1-11, *Arcana Coelestia* 547-549

### **2 Samuel 24:1-4, 8-10**

<sup>1</sup> Again the anger of the LORD was aroused against Israel, and He moved David against them to say, "Go, number Israel and Judah." <sup>2</sup> So the king said to Joab the commander of the army who was with him, "Now go throughout all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and count the people, that I may know the number of the people." <sup>3</sup> And Joab said to the king, "Now may the LORD your God add to the people a hundred times more than there are, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king desire this thing?" <sup>4</sup> Nevertheless the king's word prevailed against Joab and against the captains of the army. Therefore Joab and the captains of the army went out from the presence of the king to count the people of Israel. . . .

<sup>8</sup> So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. <sup>9</sup> Then Joab gave the sum of the number of the people to the king. And there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men who drew the sword, and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men. <sup>10</sup> And David's heart condemned him after he had numbered

the people. So David said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done; but now, I pray, O LORD, take away the iniquity of Your servant, for I have done very foolishly."

### **John 2:1-11**

<sup>1</sup> On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup> Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup> And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, "They have no wine." <sup>4</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." <sup>5</sup> His mother said to the servants, "Whatever He says to you, do *it*." <sup>6</sup> Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece. <sup>7</sup> Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup> And He said to them, "Draw *some* out now, and take *it* to the master of the feast." And they took *it*. <sup>9</sup> When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. <sup>10</sup> And he said to him, "Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the *guests* have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!" <sup>11</sup> This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.

### **Arcana Caelestia 547-549 portions**

None of the souls who come into the other life know what heaven or heavenly joy is. Most think it is a joy they can enter into regardless of how they have lived. Even those who hated their neighbor and indulged in a life of adultery believe this, entirely unaware that heaven is love — a love both mutual and chaste — and that heavenly joy is the happiness welling up from love.

Several times I have talked to spirits newly arrived from the world about the conditions of eternal life. "The Lord alone rules not just heaven but the whole universe," I said. "Whoever rules the one rules the other. "The kingdom in which you now find yourself is the Lord's. The laws of this kingdom are eternal truths, all founded on this solitary law: you are to love the Lord above all and your neighbor as yourself. Not only this, in fact, but if you want to be like angels, you'll have to love your neighbor more than yourselves."

"That this kind of love is possible you could have known from the love between certain married partners who would prefer death to seeing their spouse injured. You could have known it from the love parents have for their children: a mother would rather starve than see her baby go hungry. . . . You could have known it from true friendship in people who risk danger for the sake of their friends. . . ."Last, you could have known it from the nature of love, which is such that its joy is to serve others, not for one's own sake but for the other person's." But these things were incomprehensible to those who loved themselves more than others . . . .

The angelic state is such that everyone conveys his or her own blessings and happiness to others. In the next life there is a communication and keen perception of all feelings and thoughts, so that in the sharing of joy each communicates to all and all to each, which essentially makes every individual the center of all the rest. This is how heaven is set up. As a result, the more people there are to make up the Lord's kingdom, the greater the happiness is; it increases as the numbers increase. This is why heavenly happiness is inexpressible.