

Renewal overview 2: Signs, Symbols, and Substance. John 2:1 – 11
I imagine being on holiday and seeing a sign saying, 'Uluru 100 KMs Ahead', but deciding to stop and commence your holiday under the sign. As we reflect upon Jesus turning water into wine, we need to keep in mind that John has said, *"This is the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed in Cana in Galilee."* (2:11) So where is this sign pointing?

Clue # 1: Jesus' unusual conversation with his mother: *"Woman¹, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come.* (John 2:4) Jesus' words are idiomatic and difficult to translate. However, they probably mean something like, *"What does my interest in this matter have in common with yours?"* Jesus went on to further hint, *"My time has not yet come."* In other words, the things that Jesus wanted to reveal through this miracle were beyond his mother's immediate concern to spare the wedding host the embarrassment of running out of wine. Though Mary probably didn't fully understand what Jesus was talking about, she did understand that he was about to act; for she said to the servants, *"Do whatever he tells you."* (2:5)

Clue # 2: Jesus' symbolic use of ceremonial water jars: *(John 2:6)* Jesus' decision to use these jars wasn't just because they happened to be available, but because of their association with ceremonial washing. We learned previously that John merely baptised (ceremonially washed²) with water, but through Christ's death, resurrection and the pouring out of his Spirit, he would bring about a far more thorough and eternal cleansing in us (John 1:29 – 34).

Clue # 3: Wine as a symbol of things to come. The other three gospels clearly link the Passover wine of Christ's Last Supper with his blood that was shed for us on the cross (e.g. Luke 22:7,20). However, John makes this link more indirectly – not telling us of the cup of wine (and bread) shared in the upper room, but instead, of yet another ceremonial washing, involving a basin of water (13:1 – 8). John goes on to make his final link between water and Jesus' blood when he records that, after Christ's death, when his heart was pierced, blood and water flowed from his side (19:34). This statement seems to finally connect Jesus' water-wine miracle at Cana to his Passover-Blood shed on the cross. But this isn't the only event to which this miraculous sign points. It would appear that Jesus deliberately chose to perform this sign at a wedding feast, since marriage is a covenant of a new family relationship. Thus, the wedding master's declaration, *"Everyone brings out the choice wine first...but you have saved the best till now."* becomes symbolic, not only of Christ coming to earth to bring us into relationship with himself, but also of the wonderful wine we will one day drink with him at the great wedding feast of the Lamb. (Matthew 26:27 – 29; Revelation 19:9)

¹ There is no disrespect intended in this term. It could be translated with the term, 'M'am' still used in parts of the US – a term of respectful endearment.

² See John 3:25 – 26.

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1. This passage speaks to us of a miraculous sign in which Jesus turned water into wine. What is the purpose of a miraculous sign?
2. In what other ways are water and wine used as symbols in the Bible?
3. Why do you think Jesus' mother Mary was concerned about running out of wine? (2:3)
4. What do you think Jesus meant by his strange reply to his mother; and how was his interest in this matter different to hers? (2:4)
5. What can you deduce about the meaning behind Jesus' miracle based on the nature and volume the six 100-litre ceremonial washing water-containers Jesus used in this miracle? (2:6 - 7)
6. What does the comment from the master of the wedding banquet tell us about the nature of the wine and the meaning behind this sign?
7. John tells us that Jesus' turning water into wine miracle was the first sign that he performed at Cana in Galilee (2:11). Why do you suppose Jesus chose the occasion of a wedding to perform his first sign? (2:1 - 2)
8. Reflect on how this study has shaped your understanding of the Christian symbols: Water and wine.