

Session 5. They Have No Wine

Movement II. Christ Restores It

Passages: John 2:1-11; John 19:25-27; Isaiah 25:6; Amos 9:13-14

Part 1. Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. That the group traces the word hour through John's Gospel and discovers for itself that the first sign, given at a wedding, is pointed at the cross, and that the woman who speaks at the wedding is standing there again when the hour arrives.

Catholic Touchstone. The Church has always read Christ's presence at the wedding at Cana as the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and as the announcement that from that point marriage would be an efficacious sign of his presence (CCC 1613).

What You Need to Know

Last week was heavy on purpose. Tonight opens at a party, and the party fails. That sequence is not an accident of the syllabus; it is the shape of the Christian life. The teaching comes first and it is impossible, and then Christ shows up in the middle of a household disaster with a hundred and fifty gallons of wine.

WHAT RUNNING OUT OF WINE ACTUALLY MEANT

A first century Galilean wedding was not an evening. It was a multi day feast, and the groom's family carried the obligation to provide. In an honor culture, running out of wine was not an inconvenience, it was a public humiliation with lasting social cost. When the text says they have no wine, it means the celebration is about to become a story the village tells at their expense.

Make sure your couples feel that before you say anything spiritual about it. This is a wedding where the plans failed in front of everyone.

THE WOMAN WHO NOTICES

Mary is the first person John records naming the need. What she says to her son is not a request in form. It is a statement of fact: they have no wine. She names the need and leaves the response to him.

That is worth teaching directly to engaged couples, because it is a model of intercession and also, frankly, a model of how to raise a problem with a spouse.

THE HARD SENTENCE IN VERSE 4

Jesus answers, O woman, what have you to do with me? My hour has not yet come. Do not skip past this and do not explain it away.

Two honest notes. First, the phrase translated what have you to do with me renders a Semitic idiom that indicates distance or a difference of concern between two parties. Its exact force here is disputed among interpreters, and it does not carry the contempt that the English can suggest. Second, the address woman is unusual for a son speaking to his mother, and John uses it again at the cross in 19:26. Many readers, including in the Catholic tradition, take the repetition as deliberate, linking Mary to the woman of Genesis 3:15. That reading is legitimate and not defined; present it as a reading rather than as the meaning.

What is not disputed is what happens next. He answers that his hour has not yet come, and then he acts, and she has already told the servants to do whatever he says. Her confidence is not shaken by his answer.

DO WHATEVER HE TELLS YOU

These are the last words of Mary recorded anywhere in Scripture. She never speaks again in the New Testament. That is a striking fact to put in front of a room, and it is verifiable in thirty seconds by anyone who wants to check.

That sentence summarizes the Christ-centered direction of authentic Marian devotion. She notices a need, she brings it to her son, and she points away from herself.

SIX STONE JARS

The detail is precise: six stone water jars used for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. That is somewhere between a hundred and twenty and a hundred and eighty gallons of wine, which is a comic and extravagant amount for a village wedding whose party is nearly over.

Two things are being said. Many Christians read the purification jars and the new wine as a sign of fulfillment, the water of the old rites giving way to the wine of the new. And the abundance is absurd, because that is what the prophets said the messianic age would look like: mountains dripping with sweet wine, a feast of rich food and well aged wine for all peoples (Amos 9:13-14; Isaiah 25:6).

A cautious note on the number six. Some commentators make much of six as one short of seven, a symbol of incompleteness. It is a reasonable reading and John does use numbers deliberately, but it is an interpretation rather than something the text asserts. Offer it as a possibility, not as a decoding.

THE HOUR, AND WHERE IT GOES

In John, the hour is a technical term for the Paschal hour, centered on the cross and including his glorification and return to the Father. Watch it move: not yet come at 2:4, not yet come at 7:30 and 8:20, and then at 12:23 the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified, and at 13:1 and 17:1 it has arrived.

So the first sign, worked at a wedding, is dated by reference to the crucifixion. And when the hour does come, John puts the same woman at the foot of the cross and has Jesus address her with the same word. The wedding and the cross are tied together at both ends.

That is the theological center of tonight, and your group can find it themselves with a concordance and twelve minutes. Let them.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

- Isaiah 25:6. A feast of rich food and well aged wine, on the mountain, for all peoples. The messianic banquet.
- Amos 9:13-14. The mountains shall drip sweet wine. Abundance as a sign of restoration.
- Genesis 3:15. The woman and her offspring. Relevant to the address at Cana and at the cross, offered as a reading rather than as a certainty.
- The prophetic marriage covenant of Session 3 stands directly behind a Gospel that opens its signs at a wedding.
- Revelation 19:6-9. The marriage supper of the Lamb. The passage does not mention wine; the connection to Cana is typological. Session 14.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. AUGUSTINE ON WHY CHRIST CAME TO A WEDDING

Preaching through John's Gospel, St. Augustine argued in substance that Christ went to the wedding to confirm that marriage is his own creation and not something merely tolerated, and that anyone who claims marriage is evil should notice where the Lord chose to work his first sign.

That argument had a live target in Augustine's day, when several movements taught that the body and marriage were beneath the truly spiritual. It has a live target now for the opposite reason: a culture that treats marriage as a lifestyle option rather than as something Christ deliberately entered.

Summary of his teaching in the Tractates on the Gospel of John.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. JOHN PAUL II ON THE MOTHER AT CANA

In his encyclical on the Blessed Virgin, St. John Paul II read the Cana scene as showing Mary's particular way of being present: she notices a human need, she places it before her son, and she then directs everyone else toward him rather than toward herself.

He also noted the link between the address at Cana and the address at the cross, and read the two scenes together as the frame of her role in the life of the Church.

Note for your couples: this is what Catholic devotion to Mary actually is. Do whatever he tells you.

Summary of his teaching on the Cana scene in Redemptoris Mater.

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: ST. LOUIS DE MONTFORT ON GOING THROUGH THE MOTHER

St. Louis de Montfort taught, in substance, that everything Mary does terminates in Christ, and that devotion to her which does not end in him has misunderstood her entirely.

Test it against the text. At Cana she speaks twice: once to her son about a need, and once to the servants about obedience to him. Then she does not speak again in the scene.

Summary of his teaching in True Devotion to Mary.

Catechism Connection

CATECHISM CONNECTION

CCC 1613 is the paragraph for tonight, and it is precise about what the Church claims: the Church sees in the Cana scene the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the announcement that from then on marriage will be an efficacious sign of Christ's presence.

Note carefully what that does not say. It does not say the sacrament was instituted at Cana by a formula, and you should not say so either. The Church's case for the sacramentality of marriage rests principally on Ephesians 5 and on her constant tradition, which Sessions 6 and 7 will take up.

CCC 1335 connects the abundance of wine at Cana to the Eucharist, as a sign of the wedding feast in the Father's kingdom.

CCC 2618 treats Mary's intercession at Cana as the model of her intercession in the Church.

CCC 2618 is the Cana paragraph, and **CCC 964** treats Mary's union with her Son at the cross. The link between the two scenes is a reading of the text rather than a claim either paragraph makes, and the discovery your group makes tonight should be presented that way.

THREAD WATCH (LEADER ONLY)

They Have No Wine is planted tonight, and it is the pastoral thread of the study. Say the phrase out loud more than once and let it become a shorthand in the room. It will return in Session 10 when self control runs out, in Session 11 when plans run out, in Session 13 when everything runs out, and in Session 14 when the good wine is finally served.

The Bridegroom develops quietly. If someone connects the wedding at Cana to God as bridegroom from Session 3, affirm it and stop. The full payoff is Session 14.

One Flesh is silent tonight.

Do not preview Ephesians 5. Next week is the pivot of the whole study and it needs to land as a surprise. If a participant races ahead to Ephesians during the discussion, thank them, write it on the board, and tell them you are keeping it for next week.

IF A COUPLE IS IN AN IRREGULAR SITUATION (LEADER ONLY)

Couples whose wedding planning is going badly. Tonight is the night they will hear their own situation in the text, and that is a gift rather than a distraction. Let the conversation about failed plans be real. It disarms the room.

Marian devotion in a mixed room. If one fiancé is not Catholic, tonight can feel like the session where the Catholic strangeness shows. Handle it by staying in the text. The particular Marian claims in tonight's session are visible in eleven verses: she notices, she asks, she points to him, she goes quiet. Invite the non-Catholic participant to say what they see in the passage, and take their answer seriously.

A couple under financial strain over the wedding. Somebody in the room is quietly panicking about the cost of the reception. Cana is a good night to say plainly that the sacrament is the wedding and the party is the party, and that God has never once been impressed by a venue.

Session Goals

1. The group can describe what running out of wine meant socially, so that the miracle registers as a rescue rather than as a convenience.
2. The group handles verse 4 honestly, including the disputed idiom, without either flinching from it or over explaining it.
3. The group traces the word hour through John and discovers on its own that it refers to the cross.
4. The group finds the second use of the address woman at John 19:26 and draws the connection themselves.
5. Every participant can state what CCC 1613 actually claims about Cana, and what it does not claim.
6. The phrase they have no wine enters the room's vocabulary as the name for the moment a marriage runs out of its own resources.

Time Note and Pre-Chosen Cuts

Ninety-minute plan. Opening prayer, 5 minutes. Win questions, 12. Reading John 2:1-11 aloud, 4. Build questions 1 through 5, 25. Live discovery moment on the hour, 15. Build questions 6 through 8 and the steelman, 20. Send and Live It, 6. Closing prayer, 3.

Seventy-five minute plan. Cut the Dig Deeper box and Build question 3. Keep the hour discovery; it is the session.

If the room is flat, ask early for stories of weddings where something went badly wrong. Every room has three and they are usually funny, and the laughter buys you the seriousness later.

Part 2. Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

OPENING PRAYER

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lord Jesus, you went to a wedding, and while you were there the whole thing started to fall apart. You did not lecture the family about better planning. You gave them more than they had lost. Come to our weddings, and to our marriages, and to the places where we have already run out. Teach us to notice what is missing the way your mother noticed, and to do whatever you tell us. Amen.

Win. Getting Started

Open questions. No wrong answers, no answer box. Let every couple speak once before anyone speaks twice.

- A.** Tell us about a wedding, yours or anyone's, where something went badly wrong. What happened, and what does everyone remember now?
- B.** When something is going wrong in a group, are you the person who notices first or the person who finds out last? Be honest, and let your fiancé vote.

Build. Into the Text

Read John 2:1-11 aloud. It is short. Read it twice, by two different readers, before you ask anything.

- 1.** Verse 3 says the wine gave out. What would that actually have meant for the family hosting?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Public humiliation, not inconvenience. A wedding feast ran for days and the host family carried the obligation to provide. Running out was the kind of failure a village remembered.

Fill in what your couples know from their own planning: this is the moment the caterer calls and says the food will not be enough, in front of everyone, permanently.

The miracle is a rescue of somebody's dignity. That is not a small thing for God to trouble himself with, and it tells you something about him.

- 2.** What exactly does Mary say to Jesus, and what does she not say?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

She says they have no wine. That is all. It is a statement, not a request, and it contains no instructions about what he should do.

She also does not tell the hosts, the steward, or the disciples. She takes the problem directly to him.

Ask the room what it would change if spouses raised problems with each other this way. Name the thing that is missing, without a demand attached and without an audience.

3. Verse 4 is difficult. Read it again. What is your honest first reaction to how he answers his mother?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Let the room say that it sounds harsh, because it does in English. Do not rush to defend it.

Then give them the two honest notes. The phrase translated what have you to do with me renders a Semitic idiom marking a difference of concern between two parties, and its precise force here is genuinely disputed among interpreters. It does not carry the contempt the English suggests.

And the address woman is unusual from a son to his mother. John uses it again at the cross, in 19:26. Many readers take the repetition as deliberate and hear an echo of the woman of Genesis 3:15. That is a legitimate reading, and it is a reading rather than a definition. Say which is which.

Then point at what is not disputed: he answers that his hour has not yet come, and then he acts anyway, and she never doubted that he would.

4. What does she say to the servants, and why is it worth knowing that these are her last recorded words in the Bible?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Do whatever he tells you. And yes, she never speaks again anywhere in the New Testament. Anyone in the room can verify that this week.

Her last recorded words point away from herself. That is the direction of authentic Catholic devotion to Mary in one sentence, and it is a useful thing to be able to say to a Protestant friend.

For a marriage, it is also a workable rule. Two people who both do whatever he tells them will not need to negotiate nearly as much as they think.

5. Count the jars, and count the gallons. Why would John record the volume?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

Six stone jars, twenty or thirty gallons each, used for the Jewish rites of purification. That is roughly a hundred and twenty to a hundred and eighty gallons.

It is a startling amount for a party that is nearly over, and the abundance is the message. The prophets described the age to come in exactly these terms: a feast of well aged wine for all peoples, and mountains dripping with sweet wine (Isaiah 25:6; Amos 9:13-14).

The jars were for purification. The water of the old rites becomes the wine of the new. John does not explain the symbolism, he just tells you what the jars were for and lets you work it out.

If someone offers that six is one short of seven and therefore signifies incompleteness, that is a reasonable reading and not something the text asserts. Mark it as an interpretation.

LIVE DISCOVERY MOMENT

This is the discovery that makes the session. Do not tell them what they are looking for beyond the instruction.

The instruction: in verse 4 Jesus says his hour has not yet come. Find every other place in John where the hour is spoken of that way, and write down what has happened by the time it arrives.

Give them twelve minutes, in pairs, with a concordance or a search. Point them to the Gospel of John only.

What they will find: John 7:30 and 8:20, where no one arrests him because his hour had not yet come. Then 12:23, the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified, spoken as he begins to talk about a grain of wheat falling into the earth and dying. Then 13:1 and 17:1, where the hour has arrived and he is going to the Father.

Then ask: so what is the hour? They will say the cross. Let them say it.

Then send them to one more passage: John 19:25-27. Ask what they notice about who is standing there and what he calls her.

Then ask the closing question and stop. John begins the signs at a wedding, dates that wedding by reference to the hour, and puts the same woman at the hour when it comes. Why would he build it that way? Take answers. Do not resolve it. Session 14 resolves it.

BUILD THEN PRESS: CANA HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH MARRIAGE

Build it at full strength.

Build it seriously, because a sharp Protestant friend will make exactly this argument and it has real force.

Read John 2 without Catholic assumptions and notice what is absent. The bride is never named or even mentioned. The groom appears once, to be teased by the steward. Nothing is said about the couple, their vows, their union, or God's design for marriage. The sign is about Jesus: he manifests his glory and his disciples believe. The stone jars point to Jewish purification giving way to something new. In other words, this is a Christological sign about the arrival of the messianic age, and the wedding is scenery. To build a doctrine of sacramental marriage on it is to read a conclusion into a story that is plainly about something else. And it is telling that Catholics cite Cana at all, since if the sacrament were really instituted here, one would expect a word of institution, as at the Last Supper.

Then press.

Concede the main point at once, and concede it fully. The primary sense of John 2 is Christological. There is no word of institution. The Catechism does not claim there is one, and the paragraph is careful: the Church sees in this scene the confirmation of the goodness of marriage and the announcement that marriage will henceforth be an efficacious sign of Christ's presence (CCC 1613). Announcement and confirmation are not institution, and a Catholic who overstates that has weakened his own case.

Then press on where the Catholic argument actually stands. It stands on Ephesians 5:31-32, where St. Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 and calls it a great mystery concerning Christ and the Church, and on the constant practice of the Church. Sessions 6 and 7 make that case. Cana is corroboration, not foundation.

Press second on John's method. This is a Gospel in which nothing is scenery. John chooses the setting of every sign with care, and the first sign of the incarnate Word is worked at a wedding, in a Gospel that will later have the Baptist call himself the friend of the bridegroom (John 3:29) and whose Passion narrative has the beloved disciple take the mother home. If a novelist did this we would call it deliberate.

Press third with the discovery the group just made. The wedding is dated by reference to the hour, and at the hour the same woman is addressed with the same word. That structure is not an accident and it is not a Catholic invention; it is in the text and anyone can check it.

Do not overclaim in return. Do not say Cana proves the sacrament. Say that the Church reads Cana in the light of the whole Scripture and of her own practice, which is exactly what she says she does.

COUPLE CONVERSATION (JUST THE TWO OF YOU, NOT THE ROOM)

Just the two of you.

Where have we already run out? Name one place where our own resources, patience, money, self control, or family goodwill have already given out during this engagement.

What did we do when it happened? Did either of us think to say it out loud to God the way Mary said it, plainly and without instructions?

6. The steward tells the bridegroom he has kept the good wine until now. What does that sentence do at the end of the story?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

It reverses the ordinary expectation, which the steward states out loud: everyone serves the good wine first, when people can still taste it.

The pattern of God is the opposite. The best is later. That is worth saying in a room where several couples privately fear that they are currently at the peak of their romance and everything after the wedding is decline.

Keep the phrase. The good wine kept until now is going to come back in Session 14.

DIG DEEPER: THE BRIDEGROOM WHO IS NOT THERE

Notice the small oddity in verse 9. The steward praises the bridegroom for wine the bridegroom did not provide. The real provider is standing in the room and is not thanked.

Many readers see this irony as deliberate. Two chapters later the Baptist will call himself the friend of the bridegroom who rejoices at the bridegroom's voice (John 3:29), and by then the reader knows who the bridegroom actually is.

7. Verse 11 says this was the first of his signs and that his disciples believed in him. Given everything else that Jesus could have done first, what does it say that this was the one?

ANSWER (SHARE AFTER THE DISCUSSION)

That he began among people, at a family celebration, solving an embarrassing domestic problem generously and almost anonymously.

And that he was willing to enter a wedding as a guest. The Church's claim is not that Cana created the sacrament, but that God did not consider marriage beneath him, and the first sign is where he showed it (CCC 1613).

Ask them what it would mean to invite him to their wedding in a sense stronger than the seating chart.

Send. Carrying It Out

Open questions again. No answer boxes.

- Y.** In your marriage, what will be the sign to you that you have run out of wine, and what will you do when you see it?
- Z.** Who is the person in your life who notices what is missing before anyone else does? Have you ever thanked them?

Live It This Week

- **Name one thing you have run out of, out loud, in prayer, together.** Do not add instructions for God about how to fix it. Say the sentence and stop, the way Mary did.
- **Do whatever he tells you, once, specifically.** Choose one thing you already know Christ is asking of you and that you have been putting off, and do it this week. Tell your fiancé which one you chose.
- **Thank the person who notices.** Call or write the person in your life who sees what is missing before anyone else. Tell them you noticed them noticing.
- **Read Ephesians 5:21-33 before next session,** the whole passage, and read it twice. Next week is the pivot of this study.

Closing Prayer

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord Jesus, you turned water kept for washing into wine kept for joy, and you did it because a family was about to be shamed. Do that for us. Take what is ordinary and dutiful in us and make it glad. When we run out, and we will, let your mother's words be ours: they have no wine, and then, do whatever he tells you.

Our Lady of Cana, pray for us. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

His mother said to the servants, Do whatever he tells you.

John 2:5

Part 3. Leader Reference Card

Every passage used in this session, in the order it appears.

- John 2:1-11. The session text, read twice.
- John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23; 13:1; 17:1. Found by the group tracing the hour.
- John 19:25-27. The woman at the cross, found by the group.
- John 3:29. The friend of the bridegroom, used in the Dig Deeper box.
- Isaiah 25:6. The feast of well aged wine.
- Amos 9:13-14. The mountains dripping sweet wine.
- Genesis 3:15. Offered as a reading behind the address woman, not as a certainty.
- Ephesians 5:21-33. Assigned reading before Session 6.

Catechism Paragraphs Used

CCC 726, 964, 1335, 1613, 2618.

Before Next Session

Read Ephesians 5:21-33 before Session 6. Read the whole passage, twice.