

05.

Scene 5. The marriage feast of Cana (John 2:1-12)



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Before we look at John's account of the marriage feast at Cana, we need to remind ourselves of a number of considerations.

1. The author is a witness who gives creative expression to his faith-insights into the real Jesus. Facts are important to him for it is his belief that God is revealed in the real Jesus of history.
2. He does not hesitate to use drama when it helps him communicate the truth about the Jesus he came to know.

In 1984 the Pontifical Biblical Commission produced a document entitled *'Theological Interpretations in the Gospel Traditions: Scripture and Christology'*. It included the following statement (2.2.2.2 b):

'The Gospel traditions were gathered and gradually committed to writing **in the light of Easter**, until at length they took a fixed form in four booklets. These booklets do not simply contain things **'that Jesus began to do and teach'** (Acts 1:1); they also present



theological interpretations of such things. In these booklets, then, one must learn to look for the Christology of each evangelist ... Authors whose writings are preserved in the New Testament have interpreted the deeds and sayings of Jesus in diverse ways.'

In *Theological Studies* (1981), the eminent Catholic Scripture scholar, Raymond Brown wrote: 'The Bible is the literary objectification of a faith that is a response to revelation' (page 9).

He goes on to define Scripture as: 'divine revelation to which human beings have given expression in words' (page 13).

In order to communicate the wonder of Jesus, the Gospel writers do not hesitate to search the Sacred Scripture for images that will help them in their writing to portray Jesus as the fulfilment of the Scriptures, who witnessed to the fulfilment of Israel's hopes and prayer.

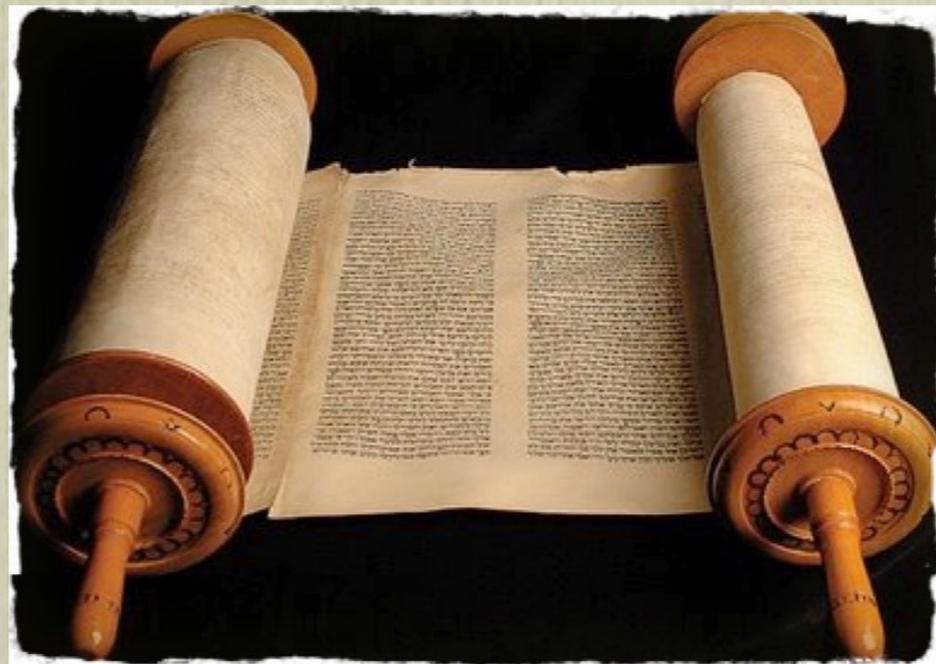


Photo of Torah scroll link: <https://www.newsghana.com.gh/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/torah-scroll.jpg>

Nowhere is this more clearly evident than in the scene we are about to examine: Jesus present at a wedding feast in Cana. It is found only in John. He calls on the faith of Israel in God as a husband, committed to the covenant of love with the people, to present Jesus as the bridegroom, inviting everyone to be part of the marriage feast. This sets the scene for everything John wants to say about Jesus, and so about God as Love.

It is followed by a scene that John has taken from the tradition: Jesus' emptying the temple. In the other Gospels it is presented as Jesus' final confrontation with the Jewish leaders, a confrontation that leads them to resolve to have Jesus handed over to Pilate and crucified.

John places the scene here at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, and in sharp contrast to the scene at Cana. John is challenging his contemporaries – and the challenge is there for us – we either stay with the picture of God that is symbolised by temple sacrifice or we accept that God is our Bridegroom who is inviting us to an intimate communion, symbolised by a wedding feast.

John has constructed this scene to portray the essence of Jesus' mission. He wants us to keep it in mind as we watch Jesus' teaching and healing, right through to the Last Supper and Jesus' death and Resurrection.

John 2:1

‘On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee.’

The ‘third day’ is the day when God is revealed.

YHWH said to Moses: “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them prepare for the third day, because on the third day YHWH will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people ... So Moses went down from the mountain to the people. He consecrated the people, and they washed their clothes. And he said to the people, “Prepare for the third day” ... On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled ... Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because YHWH had descended upon it in fire; the smoke went up like the smoke of a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently’(Exodus 19:10-18)

God as a Husband who has entered into a covenant of love with the whole earth.

‘Your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name; the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer, the God of the whole earth he is called. For the Lord has called you like a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, like the wife of a man’s youth when she is cast off, says your God. For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer’(Isaiah 54:5-8).

‘You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land **Married**; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you’ (Isaiah 62:4-5).

‘I will bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her ... and she shall respond as in the days of her youth ... On that day, says the Lord, you will call me, ‘**My husband,**’ ... I will take you for **my wife** forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord’ (Hosea 2:14-16,19-20).

‘Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory,
for **the marriage of the Lamb** has come,
and his bride has made herself ready ...
Blessed are those who are invited
to the marriage supper of the Lamb’ (Revelation 19:7,9).

John 2:1-4

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.”

The former covenant has done all it can. ‘No longer do they drink wine with singing’ (Isaiah 24:9). Jesus’ mother represents every mother who has ever hoped for the coming of the promised Messiah. She turns to her son, the only one now who can bring about the communion that was the purpose of the covenant. Jesus is the icon of God, the bridegroom whom God is commissioning to reveal God’s love for all, to heal people from whatever it is that is holding them back from welcoming God’s grace, and reveal God as Love.

John 2:4

Jesus said to his mother: 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?'

This is a Semitic idiom. It always presents a baulk to the questioner, often, as here, requiring the questioner to look carefully at what they are asking. Some times the one being asked does not agree to act as requested. Other times the one being asked does agree to meet the request. This is the case here.

In the interpretation which I am following Jesus goes on to give his reason for asking his mother (and so every mother) to think again about their request: **'Has not my hour now come?'** When this phrase is used in other places in the Gospel, it is correctly translated: 'the hour has not yet come' (John 7:30; 8:20; 12:23). It is understandable that most translations understand it in the same way here, missing the point, it seems to me, that here we are dealing with a question, not a statement.

The Greek οὐπω ἦκει ἡ ὥρα μου is capable of either translation. The context seems to me to demand: **'Has not my hour now come?'**

Jesus' 'hour' is the 'hour' of his glorification. It comes in its fullness only when Jesus is 'lifted up' on the cross, in the resurrection and when he ascends to enjoy the full intimacy of communion with God, as Jesus the Incarnate Word.

Only when the hour is fulfilled can Jesus pour out in its fullness the wine of the Spirit. However, while the hour will come to its fullness later, it begins here at Cana in response to the Woman's cry.

John 2:5

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

Mosaic by Fr Marko Rupnik SJ, Our Lady of the Southern Cross Church, Springfield Lakes, Brisbane, Personal Photo.



Mary and John at the Foot of the Cross, Society of Mary Generalate Building, Rome, Photo Nicole Trahan.



It is no accident that Jesus' mother makes her second appearance when this 'hour' finally comes, where she is presented as the mother of the people of the new covenant (John 19:25-37).



Pat O'Carrigan

At Cana she represents every mother of the old covenant who has longed for the Messiah, and as a mother, instructs her children: **‘Do whatever he tells you.’**



Mosaic by Fr Marko Rupnik SJ
Lady of the Southern Cross
Church, Springfield Lakes,
Brisbane, Personal Photo.

John 2:6-7

Mosaic by Fr Marko Rupnik SJ
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Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding eighty to a hundred litres. Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim.



The jars represent the Jewish way of life as their response to God’s covenant. Its purpose has been achieved. There is nothing more that can be done. The six water jars are full of water., awaiting God’s word to usher in the seventh jar which will hold the wine of God’s Spirit, the wine that will gladden the human heart’ (Psalm 104:15)., the ‘love that is better than wine’ (Song 1:2). The hour has come to ‘drink and be drunk with love’ (Song 5:1).

John 2:8-10

He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it.

When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him,

“Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have had plenty to drink. You have kept the good wine until now.”

At last the promise given through the prophet Isaiah is being fulfilled: 'On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines' (Isaiah 25:6).

Through Jesus God is fulfilling a promise made long ago: 'They shall blossom like the vine, their fragrance shall be like the wine of Lebanon' (Hosea 14:7).

As John writes in his Prologue: 'From his fullness we have all received' (John 1:16).

John 2:11-12

Jesus did this, the first of his **signs**, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

After this he went down to Capharnaum with his mother, his brothers (ἀδελφοί), and his disciples; and they remained there a few days.

The term '**brothers**' (ἀδελφοί) could indicate that Mary had other sons. There is nothing in John's Gospel to rule out this possibility. However in an Aramaic extended family the term could refer to sons of an earlier marriage of Joseph (so Epiphanius) or sons of Joseph's brother or Mary's sister (so Jerome).



Mosaic by Fr Marko Rupnik SJ
Lady of the Southern Cross
Church, Springfield Lakes,
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Scene 6 : The temple is cleared (John 2:13-25)



Ettore Masina, Jesus of Nazareth, Libreria Borgo, Rome, 1977.

Mark tells us that soon after Jesus entered Jerusalem, Jesus cleared the temple: ‘Then they came to Jerusalem. Jesus entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’? But you have made it a den of robbers.” When the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching’ (Mark 11:15-18).

This event played a part in the judgment of the Jewish Council that led to Jesus being taken to the Roman governor and crucified (see Mark 14:58 and 15:29).

Matthew and Luke follow Mark.

John places Jesus' clearing of the temple immediately after the marriage feast at Cana. This sets up a sharp contrast. From chapter three to chapter twelve, John pushes the audience to choose between the religion symbolised by the temple, and that symbolised by the marriage feast. The temple had a role to play. It stood as a statement of the presence of God dwelling among his people. Temple worship was carried out as a statement of obedience and as a statement of people's commitment to their part of the covenant.

The place where God has chosen to dwell is now Jesus. Religion is open to all peoples and is expressed through love-communion with Jesus, and, in and through Jesus, with God.

John 2:13-15

‘The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple [ἱερόν = whole precinct] he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of **them**, the **sheep** and the **cattle**, out of the temple. He also poured out the coins of the money **changers** (needed to exchange coins to ensure that only coins without an image could be used) **and overturned their tables.**



Ettore Masina, Jesus of Nazareth, Libreria Borgo, Rome, 1977.

John 2:16

He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a marketplace!”

There is a reference here to the last words of the Zechariah scroll: ‘On that day there will no longer be traders in the house of the Lord of hosts’ (Zechariah 14:21).

John 2:17

His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me” (Psalm 69:9).

John 2:18

The Jews (see John 1:19) then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?”

John 2:19-20

Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple [ναὸς - the sanctuary of God’s presence], and in three days I will raise it up.”

The Jews then said, “This temple [ναὸς] has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?”

This is the first example of John portraying people as having a mistaken understanding of Jesus’ words. It may have its origin in the context of later debates between the Jews and the Christians. It enables John to present the proper understanding of Jesus’ words: **Jesus** was speaking of the temple [ναὸς] of his body.

After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the **scripture** and the **word** that Jesus had spoken.

John 2:23

When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing.

John will speak of 'signs and wonders' (John 4:48). How are we to understand a so-called 'miracle'?

Luke writes: 'All in the crowd were trying to touch Jesus, for power (δύναμις) came out from him and healed all of them' (Luke 6:19).

In the Acts, Luke has Peter say: 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with miracles, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know' (Acts 2:22). And "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him' (Acts 10:38).

If our image of God is of an all-powerful Being who creates and sustains in being ourselves and everything we experience, and who controls everything, it follows that God can do anything God wants, including suspend what we are accustomed to speak of as the ‘laws of nature’. A God like this can intervene at will. In this understanding, a miracle is such an act of intervention.

The basic meaning of the word ‘God’ is ‘the One calling’, or ‘the One called.’ If we watch Jesus closely and listen to him as he shares his image of God, we see that ‘God’ refers to a mysterious, sustaining, and loving Presence. This Presence is constant, and constantly loving (self-giving). What happens in our world results not from an intervention of a constant, ever present, loving God, but from how, and to what degree, we welcome this Love.

In this understanding miracles are all around us. We should not be surprised at what happens when someone is open to God, as loving, as Jesus attracts people to share his faith in God, a profound healing of mind and heart takes place. This can affect the body as well. As Jesus frequently says: 'Your faith has made you whole' (Matthew 9:22, 29).

In this and the following slide I am drawing on the words of Paul Compton.

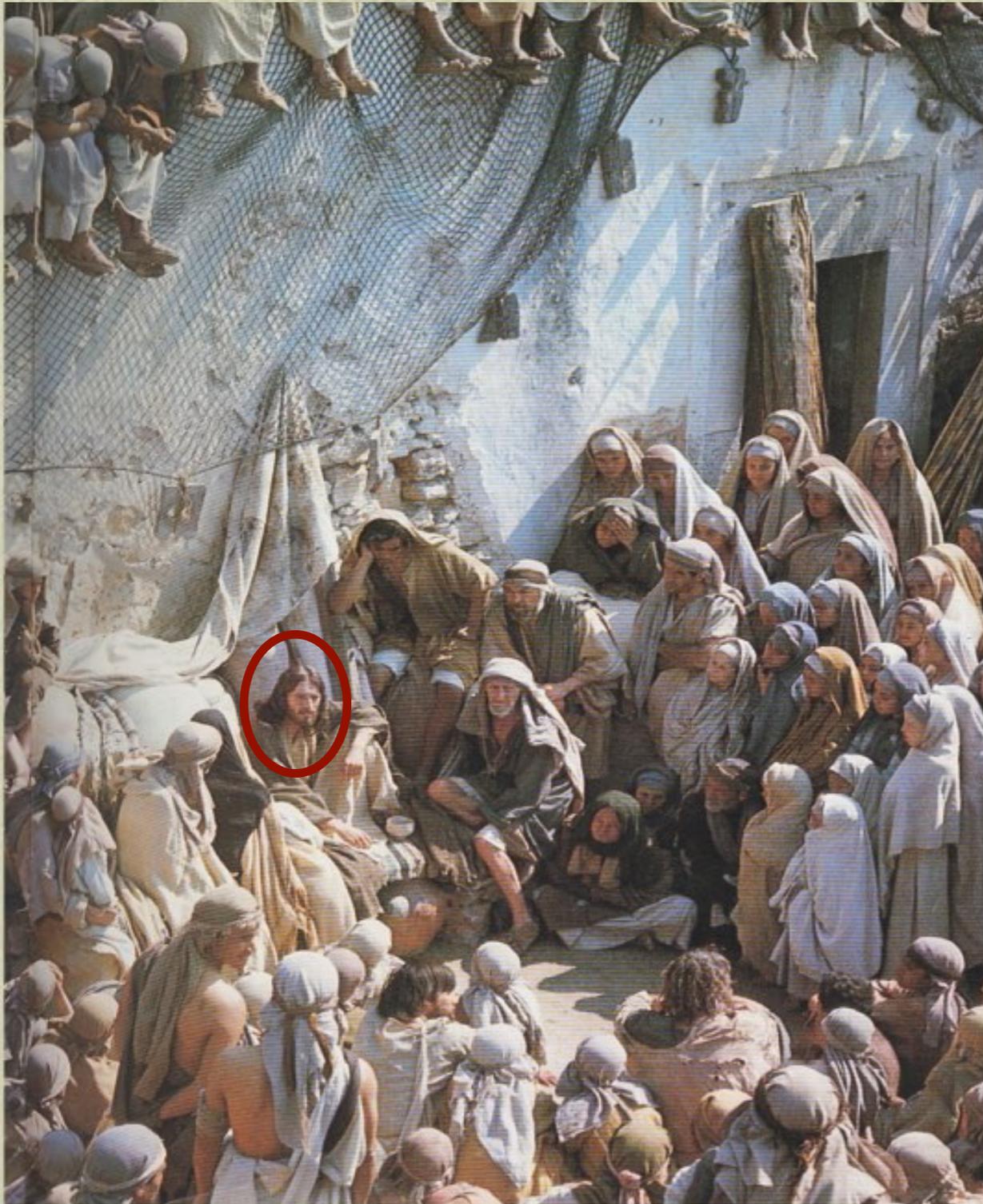
In understanding miracles in this way, we also need to reflect that a fundamental hallmark of God's ongoing gift of creation is the intelligibility of creation. We ask why, and expect to find cause and effect we expect to find scientific models to explain what is happening in creation. Our models are always incomplete, but we are deeply confident of the fundamental intelligibility of God's ongoing loving gift of creating us to be what we are and what we can become. It is our longing for communion with God that is the mainspring of this desire to know.

A 'miracle' isn't something happening outside God's on-going gift of creation. It isn't an intrinsically unintelligible extra due to God's intervention. Rather a 'miracle' alerts us to the limits of our knowledge. It can humble us and open our minds and hearts to the presence of God in our lives, not as an intervening power, but as a constant, loving presence, drawing the whole of creation into divine communion. It can alert us to be more open to the Presence and communion for which we long, to the grace that is always there for us. . As Pope Francis puts it (on the occasion of the unveiling of a bust of Benedict XVI in the Vatican Gardens on Oct. 27, 2014). "God is not a demiurge or a magician, but the creator who gives being to all things"

Cardinal Walter Kasper writes: 'Whenever something new arises, whenever life is awakened and reality reaches ecstatically beyond itself, in all seeking and striving, in every ferment and birth, and even more in the beauty of creation, something of the being and activity of God's Spirit is manifested' (*The God of Jesus Christ*, 227).

Jesus revealed God as self-giving love. Creation is an explosion of this self-giving. We become what we are called to be to the extent that we love, to the extent that we 'participate in the divine nature' (2 Peter 1:4).

Denis Edwards writes: 'God gives to creatures themselves the capacity for the new. Because of God's creative and redeeming presence to creatures, they can become something they were not. When matter comes to life on earth, when life becomes self-conscious and personal, this occurs through God enabling creation to transcend itself and become something new. Above all when one of us in the human and creaturely community, Jesus of Nazareth, is so radically open to God, so one with God, that we rightly see him as God-with-us, then we can say that in this person creation transcends itself into God' (*How God Acts*, 158).



Jesus was fully open to God's Spirit, God's creative action. John assures us: 'He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure' (John 3:34). Jesus loved perfectly.

'Miracles' show what can happen when perfect love is welcomed in 'faith'.

Ettore Masina, Jesus of Nazareth, Libreria Borgo, Rome, 1977.

The way the story of Cana is told gives the impression that we are not being asked to see the turning of water into wine as a sign of divine intervention. Much deeper truths are being shared with us, especially the truth that God is love and that we are all being graced to share the depth of divine intimacy that burned in the heart of Jesus. This becomes clearer when we contrast Cana with Jesus' action in the temple.

Cana speaks of

- the outpouring of 'the best wine'
- the Holy Spirit
- communion in God's love

The clearing of the temple speaks of

- Human Tradition
- Systemic control
- No surprises

John 2:24-25

On his part Jesus would not entrust himself to them (to those who believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing), because he knew all people and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

Seeing the signs is not the same as experiencing the signs. To experience the wonder of Jesus' love and to see it as a sign of the presence and action of God in Jesus is to be drawn into divine communion. The danger of simply witnessing to a 'sign' is that it can so easily be interpreted as magic, and bypass the necessary of a faith that welcomes grace. Jesus was well aware of the difference.

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