

History is filled with important debuts. Actors break out with a memorable debut role. Musicians have a debut single that puts them on the map. An author has a debut novel hit the top of the New York Times best seller list. Sometimes we refer to these as overnight successes, but in almost every case, an awful lot of hard work and planning went into making that debut go well.

That’s partially what makes Jesus’ debut miracle seem a little bit strange. John calls Jesus’ miracle at the wedding of Cana the first of his signs. A sign of what? A sign of who He is. A flag, a marker saying “I can do anything. I am God’s Son in human flesh.” But the strange thing is, the miracle at the wedding isn’t that dramatic. This is not the debut that we might imagine for the Son of God. Where we might dream up a big splash, something to shock the world, Jesus changes water into wine so that a wedding party isn’t ruined. That’s nice...it saves face for this new family, but it isn’t exactly an earth-shattering debut. Or is it? What was Jesus up to at that wedding?

What makes things even more odd is the little exchange between Jesus and Mary, his mother. Mary finds out that the wedding party has run out of wine, an embarrassing situation, certainly. Mary brings her concern to Jesus. She knows what he can do. But his response? He says: “Woman, why do you involve me? My hour is not yet come.” You can almost imagine Mary saying “Don’t talk to your mother that way!” She doesn’t do that. But this doesn’t sound like the Jesus who welcomed the children—the Jesus whom we imagine was Mr. Nice Guy to everyone-- this sounds like Jesus with an attitude. Well, I don’t think it’s that, really. Jesus means no disrespect. He may have even said these words with a knowing smile on his face. The actor who portrays Jesus in the movie “The Gospel of John” plays it that way. But the fact of the matter is that Jesus must’ve had an awful lot on his mind, sitting there at that wedding.

Think this through with me. Over and over again, when Jesus told stories about the kingdom of God, He compared it to a wedding banquet. Some decades later, when the apostle Paul wrote about Jesus’ relationship to the church, he compared it to a groom and a bride. The book of Revelation concludes with a vision of a Bride waiting for her groom—the Church waiting for Jesus to make all things new. So rewind now to Jesus, just beginning his ministry, sitting there at a wedding reception. There’s laughter. There’s joy. In the midst of that festive scene, Jesus is thinking about His wedding feast. Hasn’t happened yet. He’s thinking about his Bride, the church—in other words, all people who will come to believe in Him and trust in Him and love Him. It’s a beautiful thought to Jesus—it was the joy set before him, to borrow a phrase from the Bible. But it was also a horrible thought. Why horrible? Because Jesus also knew, in order to cement His relationship with His Bride, he would have to pay a terrible price. In order to draw all people to Himself in love, he would have to be raised up from the earth, ravaged by physical pain, tormented by the rejection of His Father on the cross. That’s why He tells his mother, “My hour has not yet come.” He’s talking about the hour of his death—the hour in which He will make an eternal vow to His Bride. He knows that he has to go through the cross and the tomb to get to the Feast. All of this, on Jesus’ mind, sitting there with a party going on around

Him—and it’s a party that’s about to fail—so He gets up from the table and saves the day. By the power of His Word, He creates about 150 gallons of premium wine for the guests to enjoy. The master of ceremonies is astounded. Where were they hiding the good stuff? he wonders. His mother knew and his disciples knew where it had come from, and John tells us that after experiencing this, they believed in Him.

Do you see what Jesus was up to at this wedding? He uses a real-life, potentially embarrassing situation to make His debut as the Lord of the Banquet. He gives us a picture of why he has come. What Jesus is doing in the world is setting up the greatest festival celebration that could ever be imagined. He’s coming to get His Bride, the Church, all believers, and He’s willing to pay the ultimate price to secure her love. When he does, when He makes that vow, the joy will be complete and it will never end.

Do you see where this touches your life? Right here in the Church, the party has already started. Jesus brings the sweetest wine and the greatest love to His table, this feast-before-the-feast we call Holy Communion. It is terribly ironic that sin causes to many people to keep Jesus at a distance, why? Because they think that if they go in His direction, that if they actually start following Jesus, they won’t get to have any more fun. But what the wedding of Cana tells us and what the Lord’s Supper tells us is that Jesus brings real celebration! He is, in every sense, the Life of the Party. He wants people to have “life to the full.” And so, even now, as we live in a disintegrating culture, Jesus invites us to take His loving sacrifice into ourselves and be restored. Even as we live with broken relationships and unresolved issues, Jesus invites us to be drawn into a life-saving relationship with Him. Even as we live in a war with ourselves, battling guilt and our own conscience, Jesus invites us to come and receive the forgiveness of our sins. He purifies us by the same powerful word that changed water into wine. Every time the Lord’s Supper is offered here at this altar, you have the opportunity to enter into festival joy that is total and yet is only a preview of the celebration that is coming.

So what do you think of Jesus’ debut miracle? He sat there in the midst of joy, tasting his coming sorrow, so that, in the midst of our sorrow, we can taste the coming joy. It’s here for you today. Come to the Feast.