

# Second Sunday after the Epiphany

## THE FEAST OF THE NEW CREATION

John 2:1-11

## Second Sunday after the Epiphany

### Analysis by Steven Kuhl

1On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." 5His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 9When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it had come from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." 11Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

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## DIAGNOSIS: The Feast of the Old Creation—Running Out, Inferior

### **Step 1: Initial Diagnosis** : *“There Was a Wedding” (v. 1): Celebrating the Old Creation*

The joyous scene in this week’s text, the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, is a scene that is repeated over and over again in every village, hamlet and city throughout the world. Weddings are public—or better, creational events, Cf. Gen. 2. They celebrate the fact of creation and our participation in it. They mark the fact that life originally had God’s blessing and that its continuation is rooted in that blessing. So what is the problem? This celebration and continuation of creation conceals the fact that we live as though the fact of creation—and the joy we get from it—is the whole story about life in this world. It is not. The truth is that this creation is old (John prefers the word “world” to designate this fact), meaning, it is impure (cf. v. 6), decaying, “running out” because of sin. In the text, the celebration is “running out of wine” (the symbol of God’s blessing, v. 3), and there is no hope that this creation can sustain itself, us, or our joy. True, the stewards of the celebration of this Old Creation knew this; but without some remedy, they weren’t about to tell.

### **Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis** : *“Become Drunk” (v. 10)—Trusting in the Old Creation*

The deeper problem is that we actually work at concealing the truth about the “oldness” of this creation, the sign of which, in this text, is drunkenness (v. 10). Drunkenness is a kind of faith—a misguided, false faith, to be sure, but nevertheless, a kind of faith born of sin that seeks to sustain our joy on the basis of a delusion or illusion. Drunkenness also signals our misuse of the blessings of the Old Creation (the wine of the Old Creation): a misuse that both makes them impure (cf. v. 6) and that deludes us into thinking that we are okay. No one denies

that the blessings of the Old Creation are good things from God. They are. But to misuse them to anesthetize ourselves from the truth of the oldness of this creation, made impure by sin, is to bind our fate to that Old Creation.

**Step 3: Final Diagnosis** : *“The Wine Gave Out” (v. 2)–The End of the Old Creation*

The still deeper problem is the reason why the wine gives out, why this world, the Old Creation, is coming to an end. It is not simply a “natural event,” though we have to look elsewhere than this text to find it. The wine gives out because of God’s judgment/condemnation (cf. Jn 3:17-21) upon the sinful, deluded world: God’s withdrawal of his blessing from the creation, the curse of Genesis 3, as symbolized by the empty jars for the rite of purification (v. 6). Nothing in this world can make purification. Therefore, even as the celebration of creation goes on, the truth of its impending end is all around.

**PROGNOSIS: The Feast of the New Creation–Overflowing, the Best**

**Step 4: Initial Prognosis** : *“Jesus...Invited to the Wedding”–Jesus Enters the Old Creation*

What makes this particular celebration of creation (the wedding of Cana) different is that it has invited into its midst Jesus. To be sure, at this point in the gospel, only his mother seems to be aware of his identity: that he is the source for creation’s (and our) hope. As such, she is a symbol of the nascent church in the midst of the celebration of creation, but more on that later (see John 19:26-27). Moreover, his miracle of turning water into wine is not the solution to the problem, but “a sign” of the solution that is yet to come. The problem is not that the blessings of the Old Creation are lacking. The problem is that the blessings of the Old Creation are “inferior” (v. 10), insufficient to make purification. “My hour has not yet

come" (v. 4) signals the miracle that is the solution: His death and resurrection. In his death and resurrection he takes the old dying creation to himself, purifies it in himself, and makes it new in himself. The transformation of the old into the new is so intimately connected to the person of Christ that New Creation begins to emerge right smack dab in the midst of the old.

**Step 5: Advanced Prognosis** : *"His Disciples Believed in Him"*  
(v. 11)–*Participating in the New Creation*

Disciples participate in this New Creation (with its purification and blessing) by faith in Christ, crucified and raised. Faith is not an illusion or a delusion, it is not drunkenness, but a clear, wide-eyed response to the fact that God in Christ has "revealed his glory" to save and redeem us through the cross. Faith sees what is "inferior" and what is "superior," it distinguishes between the blessing of creation and the blessings of Christ. This it does not in order to pit one against the other but so that purposes of God in the Old Creation (and its blessings) and the purposes of God in the New Creation (and its blessings) might be respected.

**Step 6: Final Prognosis** : *"You Have Kept The Good Wine Until Now"* (v. 10)–*Celebrating the New Creation in the Midst of the Old*

Although the New Creation (and its goods and benefits) comes late on the scene, it does not simply cast off or negate the Old Creation and its celebration. Jesus did not stop the party. On the contrary, he gives himself—the source of the New Creation—as the reason for the party to continue in hope until that day when God brings it to an end. True, the New Creation has its own feast—the Eucharist; but those who celebrate that feast (the church, believers in Christ, brothers and sisters of Jesus, sons and daughters of Mary—the images in the text are many) never cease to exist in and to celebrate the Old Creation with gusto. Christians still live in, render service to, and give thanks for

life in the Old Creation. Moreover, they do so precisely because of the New Creation they now also participate in and they do so in all soberness, without any illusions or delusions about its transitory nature. But this one New Creation concern is paramount as they continue to participate in the Old Creation. Unlike the stewards of the Old Creations, the stewards of the New Creation are quite eager to point to their reason for hope—Jesus himself. Of him we are eager to say with Mary, “Do whatever he tells you” (v. 5). For the wine of the New Creation is the wine that purifies and that exists in great, unending abundance!