

A miracle of excess

By [Debbie Blue](#)

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I have a recurring bad dream. It is similar to the one where you realize it's time for the final exam and you haven't been to class all semester. I used to have that dream. Now my recurring anxiety dream is of a wedding. Somehow I forgot to write the homily. I don't have the liturgy. Everyone's all dressed up waiting for me and I don't even know their names.

Weddings are often stressful. They probably should be. When I read Mary's first words in the book of John—"they have no wine"—I feel like she's expressing some archetypal anxiety.

In their Bible commentary, [Jamieson, Fausset and Brown](#) seem vindicated as Protestants by Mary's behavior. They describe her words as "officious interference." They add, "The character and authority ascribed by Romanists to the virgin is directly in the teeth of this scripture."

I rather like Mary here, but I think I get their drift. This isn't the sweet virgin pondering something in her heart. This is more like a menopausal woman kvetching to her son. *There is no wine! Again and again there's not enough. Oy vey, what're we going to do?*

Jesus' time has not yet come, but he acts anyway. He takes the water used for purifying and changes it into wine. He fills the containers that hold the liquid used for hand sanitizing with good wine. It's a little like filling a footbath with wine, the bathroom sink, the Purell container. It almost seems a little impolite and a little funny.

We don't know how the caterer or the families of the bride and groom reacted after they figured out that their jars for purification held wine. But I wouldn't be surprised if their reaction was a little mixed.

You've got all the tablecloths on straight. You decided on a nice white wine that goes well with the fish you're serving. You've planned on an orderly, moderate affair. You've assigned places, and suddenly the place cards all sprout into fragrant flowers. Gallons and gallons of a complex, robust red keep arriving to the tables. 180 gallons. Nice, maybe, but it messes with your plans.

This is a miracle of excess, and we're generally more comfortable with moderation in all things. Even grace. There are rules we'd like to see God follow, actually. Jesus comes around and messes with the rules—no wonder the religious authorities wanted to kill him. He seems genuinely dangerous to almost any system, to any plans we might have intended to implement. Jesus turns the purification water into wine. Is he going to turn our laws into gushing streams, our boundaries into blossoms, our principles into feasts for everyone to attend?

Jesus fills containers meant for holding purifying water with 180 gallons of wine. What are we going to do about purity? How are we going to accomplish it? We need the containers! God fills them with good wine, but we can't wash our hands from them anymore.

*Additional lectionary columns by Blue appear in the January 12 issue of the Century —click [here](#) to subscribe.*