

A strange first clue (John 2:1-11)

I think the disciples were a bit like detectives.

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Sherlock Holmes. Miss Marple. Hercule Poirot. Inspector Gamache. The Rev. Clare Fergusson. I love to spend time with these characters, trying to find clues and solve the latest mystery.

I think the disciples were a bit like detectives: young Jewish men, fed up with Roman oppression, on the lookout for the promised Messiah. They have their clues from scripture. Indeed, many people in the first century were looking for clues, or signs, of God's presence. They were trying to figure out who might be the Messiah. And these signs started to pop up around Jesus.

This week we read about the first of seven (or eight) signs in John: when Jesus turns some water into wine, allowing the wedding party to continue. This is a pretty cool party trick, but it seems an odd sort of sign for the son of God. If I were a first-century detective hot on the trail of the Messiah, I don't think this is the sort of sign I would be looking for.

In fact, I probably wouldn't be looking at a wedding party to begin with. The Messiah should be planning the next great revolution. So I'd look in the caves, the hideouts, maybe the prisons. Alternately, I might check the synagogues and the temple courts. I'd have plenty of places to investigate—but a party wouldn't be one of them.

Jesus' first sign seems trivial. Of all the guests at the party, the disciples are among the few who even know of the averted disaster. Because they are following the

clues, they witness the miracle. In the free-flowing wine that others take for granted, they see the glory of God.

And this is good news. That when we do our research, follow the trail, go to the right places with the right people, keep our eyes strained, we can see signs of God. I know this is true. And that's why I constantly think I should be *doing* more. Praying more, reading more spiritual books, going to more theological lectures. I should be investigating God's clues more diligently.

And yet when I have some extra time over winter break, what do I do? Pick up a mystery novel. Which is why, for me, the really good news is not that the disciples see God's glory, but that the servants see it too. The servants who are probably too tired to think much about the Messiah, let alone go looking for him; who are probably so focused on their tasks that they wouldn't even notice the glory of God unless it came right to them and, say, turned well water into fine wine.

We may expect to see God's glory when we follow the signs we know: sharing communion, singing hymns, studying scripture. But perhaps, in our search for signs of God's presence, we should pay more attention to our everyday duties. Because one thing this story clearly shows us is that God is not always or only in the expected places doing the expected things. Some signs are grand, public affairs: feeding the 5,000, raising Lazarus from the dead. And there are times in Jesus' life when he can be found in places fit for a Messiah—the synagogues, the temple, the cross.

But this first sign occurs at a wedding where Jesus, virtually unobserved, miraculously provides extra wine. So many people must have missed this sign that was literally right under their noses.

Jesus does not always reveal God's glory in the expected places or ways. Some of the first-century detectives—like the Pharisees and the Sadducees—missed the clues. But others, who would surely have been considered less sophisticated at discerning religious signs, managed to see God at work in the preacher from Nazareth.

When it comes to seeing the signs of God in the world today, sometimes we painstakingly follow the clues and discover the divine. Sometimes the divine just bumps into us as we go about our day. However God shows up, I hope I am able to see the glory and believe. But I fear there are times I miss big clues—like the

suspiciously high quality of this wine.