

Suggested Reading

A Recommended Reading

John 3:1 – 4:54

B Read Carefully

John 3:1-21	Nicodemus
John 4: 1-41	The Women at the Well
John 4: 46- 54	The cure of the Royal Official's Son

Prayer

O God, who through the blessed apostle John
have unlocked for us the secrets of your Word,
grant, we pray,
that we might grasp with proper understanding
what he so marvellously brought to our ears,
Through Christ our Lord Amen.
(From the Feast of St. John)

PFP v2/2026

Sacred Heart Catholic Church

Henley on Thames



The Wedding at Cana

3

John 2: 1-25



Chapter Two consists of two events that have a distinctly Johannine Character. The first is the Wedding at Cana, the first sign (or miracle) in the ministry of Jesus.

The second is the cleansing of the Temple, which takes place at the beginning of Jesus ministry rather than at its conclusion as in the Synoptic Gospels. In Johannine terms, this incident is more accurately described as *'the replacement of the Temple'*.

Finally, we need to place these events in the larger context of this new section of John's Gospel – *From Cana to Cana* (2:1 – 4:54) which includes the return journey from Cana to Jerusalem, the dialogue with Nicodemus, the return journey through Samaria, the encounter with the Samaritan Woman, before finally arriving back at Cana, where the Son of the Royal Official is healed. The first and second signs of Jesus form the 'bookends' to this section and are united in doing so.

Suggestion, Negative Response, Positive Action.

Why, you might well ask, is this model of suggestion, negative response and positive action, found throughout the Fourth Gospel? Does Jesus always act like an adolescent? The answer to this question is, of course, no; he is not an adolescent; but the frequency of this conduct would suggest that it is more than just a coincidence. The solution to this quandary is a matter of *agency* and *outcome*.

At first sight, we might be highly surprised that Jesus does not seem to respond positively to the agency of his mother; his disciples; and the cry of those he loves in the face of death. These 'insiders' should have a greater claim on him, and the debt of kinship might compel him to act positively. However, who can compel the Word made flesh? Who can have a claim upon the Son of God? - Except God himself. **Agency**, as the motivation for action; lies on a much higher plane than that of kinship or friendship.

The **outcome** of this action is motivated by faith: often the very persons who make the request, e.g. the Disciples, Martha, and the Royal Official. As Jesus himself reveals, the **outcome** is his glory, or God's glory revealed (2,11, 11,4), which is also much greater than human motivations.

2,1-11	4,46-54	7,1-15	11,1-27
Suggestion They have no wine 2,3	Come down and heal my son 4,47	Leave here and go to Judea 7:3-4	he whom you love is ill.11,3
Negative Response Woman, what concern is that to me? My hour has not yet come 2,4	Unless you see signs and wonders You will not believe 4,48	My time is not yet come; ... I am not going to the festival 7,6-8	This illness does not lead to death; He stayed two days longer 11,4-6
Positive Action Fill the jars with water 2,7	Go, your son will live 4,50	He also went, not publicly 7,10	let us go to Judea again 11,7

Next Week

From Cana to Cana.

We will trace the outline of this section of the Gospel (2:1 – 4:54) with particular attention to Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus, the Woman at the Well and cure of the Royal Official's Son. This is also a study of the various characters within the Gospel of John, and the growth and potential for faith as well as resistance to faith (Nicodemus).

The Hour of Jesus.

The theme of the 'hour' of Jesus begins at the start of his ministry at Cana (2,4) and runs throughout the Gospel. At Cana, Jesus addresses his mother as 'Woman', a phrase which is taken up again on the Cross: "Woman, this is your son" (19:26).

The 'hour' of Jesus refers to his **glorification** = his passion, death, and resurrection. The joint themes of the 'hour' and 'glory' are present at Cana ("He let his glory be seen, and his disciples believed in him" 2,11) and are found throughout the Book of Signs.

The ministry of Jesus draws to a close as the hour of his glorification approaches. The anointing of Jesus (12:1-11) in preparation for his burial, prepares him for that hour. The arrival of the Greeks (12:20 – 36) leads Jesus to proclaim the hour has come. Jesus recognises this as the hour to bring life from death, as the grain of wheat will lead to a future harvest. From the beginning of the Gospel, John reminds the reader that Jesus has come from the Father and is returning to the Father. Therefore, John would not contemplate Jesus turning away from this hour; instead, Jesus declares "*Father glorify your name*" (12,28).

The Signs in the Gospel of John

The first major subdivision within the Fourth Gospel is the Book of Signs (1,19 – 12,50). This section relates the ministry of Jesus, beginning with the call of the disciples and climaxing with the Raising of Lazarus. The latter is the last of the seven miracles or 'signs' in John's Gospel, all of which point to who Jesus is. Interspersed between the signs, and closely related to them, are a series of discourses which allow the author to bring to the reader's attention the full significance of the sign.

The signs (or miracles) point towards Jesus and reveal who he is. They are highly symbolic, emphasising themes such as Marriage, Healing, Eucharist, Water, Baptism, Light and Life. Throughout the book of Signs, the Jewish festivals and institutions are superseded by Jesus' himself, who takes on their meaning. Several Jewish festivals form the background to the events in this section - the Sabbath, the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Feast of Dedication.

Jesus reveals himself to be the Resurrection and the Life, as he calls Lazarus from the tomb. The author interprets and explains the full significance of this event for the reader. The Raising of Lazarus is a miracle by which Jesus gives life, but John also understands that it was the deciding factor in the decision of the Sanhedrin to seek the death of Jesus. There is the growing polarisation between those who accept Jesus and those who reject him. He encounters increasing antagonism, especially from the Jewish authorities in Jerusalem. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, the Fourth Gospel shows that judgement was already taking place during the ministry of Jesus. Judgement is a direct consequence of one's response to Jesus. In this sense every encounter with Jesus in the Gospel is also a moment of judgement.

The Wedding at Cana (2:1-12)

This narrative begins abruptly: there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee and the mother of Jesus – she is not given the name Mary in the Fourth Gospel – was there. The author is sparing in his information; he does not need to tell us why the supply of wine gave out.

It appears that the time for the mother to step in has come, she calls her son's attention to the fact that the guests have no more wine. The reader also anticipates that Jesus will proceed to perform a miracle in response to this indirect request; but then comes the surprise: Jesus refuses and follows his "No!" with the puzzling words: "*My hour has not yet come*" (2:5).

verse 4, is one of the most difficult verses to translate in the Fourth Gospel. It translates as, "*Woman, what to you and to me?*" - makes no sense at all. Therefore, translators use one of following possibilities:

Jesus' indifference to the situation, the lack of wine:

"what concern is that to you and to me?" New Revised Standard
Version

Jesus' indifference to his mother:

"what have you to do with me?" Revised Standard Version

In some cases, outward hostility

"you must not tell me what to do" Today's English Version
(Good News)

And sometimes indifference to both:

"how does this concern of yours involve me?" New American Bible

Jesus' mother is not discouraged; she says to the servants: do whatever he tells you. That obviously presupposes an unusual yet expected command of Jesus, which he immediately issues, "*fill the jars with water*" (2:6-7)

Somewhere in the house there are six enormous stone water jars of the kind required for Jewish rites of purification. Jesus commands the servants to fill

the jars up to the brim. The phrase, “they filled them up to the brim,” summarizes an action that takes considerable time. That certifies that the unheard-of volume of water is really there to be turned into wine. The water jars are now full, and Jesus has the steward of the feast draw a sample out of any one of the jars, which the narrator now knows to be full of costly wine. The abundance of wine is a feature of this sign, as it points to the coming of God’s kingdom or reign, present in the ministry of Jesus. The key to understanding the story of the wedding at Cana is to be found here, when it is said that “*He revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him*” (2:11)

The Replacement of the Temple

Why does the cleansing appear at the beginning of John’s account?

Placed at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry this scene becomes the first of a series of fulfilment/replacement motifs which run throughout the subsequent chapters, whereby Israel’s sacred space, feast days and festivals, are replaced. Therefore, this enables the raising of Lazarus to be the climax of Jesus public ministry and the significant motive for Jesus’ arrest.

v17: The disciples remembered the words of scripture:

‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’

Jesus seems to act like a blasphemer, hence in the eyes of the “Jews” (Temple Authorities, in the Synoptics) Jesus acts sinfully and cannot be God’s agent. However, the disciples, presumably after his resurrection, remember the words of Ps 69,9 which provide the correct interpretation of the events. Jesus’ actions are inspired by “zeal”, not blasphemy. Hence this becomes a positive action which seeks to advance the glory of the Father and not himself. Furthermore, inasmuch as this zeal will “consume” him, the memory of the disciples preserves the original context and connection between the events in the Jerusalem Temple and the glorification of Jesus, despite the chronological displacement.

vs14-21: The Temple

The conversation which Jesus undertakes with the Jewish authorities is an example of Johannine misunderstanding which is characterised by double-meaning words: in this case ‘*Temple*’. The authorities presume that Jesus is speaking of the actual Temple structure whereas; the narrator explains that Jesus is, in fact, speaking in terms of his own body. In this sense, the Johannine and Synoptic understanding of this episode are united, because Jesus’ *present* action *will lead* to his death. Hence, his zeal for his Father’s house *will* consume him.

The English translation “Temple” lacks the subtlety of the Greek, and its progression of terms:

- v14,15: *gk: hieron* - describes the temple precincts; the outer court of the Temple, the court of the Gentles. It is here that the action of Jesus takes place.
- V16: *gk: oikos emporiu* - a marketplace, literally a ‘market house’. (hence *emporium*)
- v16: *gk: ton oikon tou patros mou* – rather it is ‘the house of my Father’.
- v19,20,21: *gk: naos* – the Temple proper where people gather to pray: the Sanctuary.
- Jesus contrasts the Temple made of stone (*to hieron*) with the temple of his body (*ho naos*).

Of course, in English, each of these nouns is simply translated as ‘*Temple*’.

If we return to the Prologue: ‘*The Word became flesh and lived among us*’ (1:14) we noted the ‘temple language’ = “to dwell” or “to live;” but there is certainly an allusion to the holy tabernacle of the Exodus. Jesus the tabernacle, the meeting place between God and humanity. Hence in his body, he is the replacement of the Temple.