A very interesting first miracle from Jesus today. This is the very beginning of the Gospel of John, chapter 2 and Jesus has just introduced as the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, the Messiah, and the King of Isreal. It’s a huge fanfare of an introduction. And right before our lesson today Jesus says that his followers will see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Wow. So what happens next is going to be big. We’ve been set up for the most amazing thing we could think of to happen next. And it’s today lesson.

So what is it that Jesus does next? Well, you might think it would be walking on the water, or raising Lazarus from the dead, or cure a sick person, or making a blind man see. That would fit what we expect. But none of that happens. The signature event that the Gospel writer shares that is the first sign that Jesus is the Messiah, the King, the Lamb of God is that he turns water into wine so that people can continue to party at a wedding. This is interesting. The guests are already pretty loose by now, at least if we read the text, and we all know what this is. It’s great. It’s the party. And first thing that Jesus does, to announce his reign, his rule, his power, what he came to bring, is to keep that party going. To not let this thing run out of wine. Whoo Hooo! Thank you Jesus! We didn’t run out of wine. And it’s not just a couple of cases either, right. It’s a 180 gallons of liquid warm kick back goodness.

In the Bible, this is where we are heading as followers of Jesus. To the wedding feast that has no end. To a celebration where the stress is finally gone and the food is good and you are among friends and family and people and you belong there, and it’s the best thing there is in life. It’s joy, but it’s more than that, it’s just the great feast. What is better than the big cook out, and you have the rack of ribs and the smells are great and the people are friendly and all is made right with the world. The Scriptures are filled with this image of what Jesus saves in our Gospel lesson today. From Isaiah 25. On this mountain, the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a fest of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear. Don’t tell me that your mouth doesn’t water for the great feast.

So what is the first sign that Jesus gives about what he is up to? What is image of what the Lamb of God, the king of Isreal, the promised Messiah, is coming to bring? More Scriptural feasting today. From Revelation 19: Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Amighty Reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; to her it has been granted to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, “Write this: blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb”. This is the first sign in the Gospel of John. That Jesus keeps the wedding feast going. For he is not hear to get us to heaven, as much as he is here to bring heaven to earth. And the image is a great party, with plenty of wine. O Taste and see, the Scriptures say over and over. O taste and see that the Lord is good. This is not celebration of debauchery or drunkenness, but a celebration of life, and I think we all the know the difference. From John, Chapter 10. I came that they might have life, and have it abundantly. This is the goal. This is where we are headed. This will be our homecoming in the faith. And the image is a great marriage feast with an abundance of wine. It’s really good.

But the question of course is how he will do this? How will Jesus bring this feast to us? And here the point of the story is to give us a beginning, a first lesson, on how it is that Jesus will bring his followers in to this abundant life. Both of them stick out as exaggerated details if you read the story. The first one is the massive amount of water turned into wine. This is way more wine than would have been necessary. Why this exaggeration?

Well, these jars held water used for people to wash themselves before they entered the temple. Now days we use hand sanitizer to clean off all the germs. But it’s basically the same idea, they used water to purify themselves so they could enter the presence of God. And what they needed to be purified of course was their sins. And so what Jesus is doing here is turning into fine wine, this process of being cleansed from a massive problem that keeps us from the feast.

In other words, Jesus has a feast for us, but we’ve been blocked somehow. We can’t get in. It’s the same story in the creation narrative. In the Bible, God made us and put us in a garden of abundance. There was way more than enough. But then there is this fall. This fall into sin. And now, the world completely changes, and the life goes out of the party. What changes. Yeah, now it seem like there is never enough. There’s never enough time. Or money. Or love. People are starving from a lack of food, or jobs, or energy, or water. We’re blocked from the wedding feast by the fear of running out. I won’t have enough. I won’t be enough. I’m not good enough. And sure enough, that is how the story begins isn’t it? There isn’t enough. Oh my God, there is not enough wine. Not enough abundance. And that’s our broken world. A world of scarcity. Maybe I won’t be a good enough parent. My sermon won’t be enough, that blocks me from the feast all the time. If we know about the joy, we also know what blocks it don’t we, so we don’t enjoy it. We don’t live it. Instead, we live in a world of scarcity.

And something comes along with all this not enough. It’s the reality of shame. It comes from being poor for example. Or getting an F on your test. Or looking stupid, or getting picked last, you’re just not smart enough. Not good enough. The problem of all that is the shame of it. It’s really important to get a handle on shame. Shame is the source of all addiction, and it is the core experience of sin.

Let me tell you a little about me and shame, that happened last month. And it’s a little humorous hopefully, but it’s because it is so true, and we all have to deal this shame that blocks our way into the feast that God has for us. So here’s the story. Last month I was pretty sick at the beginning of the month and then all during Christmas I didn’t feel very good at all. And it was depressing and uh I just felt terrible. But one day, I got this terrible chest pain. Now I did make an appointment to check it out with the doctor and it turned out to be something called pluresy. But for the morning before my appointment I was doubled over on the couch, sort of rocking away just trying to get through each minute. It really hurt. And at one point I thought, wow, you know, maybe I’m not going to make it. It kept getting worse.

Well, here’s how powerful shame is. As much as it hurt, I looked around the living room and down the hall. And I had underwear on the floor, clothes all over, unwashed compression shorts hanging off my exercise bike, old oatmeal bowls in the living room, and bathroom it was a mess. And I thought to myself, you know, if I die, or the aid car shows up, the last thing I want them to see is that. And so as much as it hurt, and as messed up as I was, I started picking up my underwear and clearning up the bathroom, so if I died no one would see what a slob I am. Can anyone relate to this. And the point is, we would rather die, than be shamed. Yup. We’ve got to get a handle on shame. Because nothing blocks our entry into the abundant life God has for us more than shame. Why are we so concerned about our appearance? We’ve got to get handle on shame because nothing blocks our entry into the feast God has for us more.

So we know what the block is, now what is Jesus going to do about it. And here is the second little detail that seems out of place about the story. When his mom lets him know that they are out of wine, Jesus says, “Woman, what is that to me? My hour has not yet come”. And that’s a theme you’ll hear over and over in the Gospel of John. My hour has not yet come. What’s his hour. Well, it’s the reality of his death. His crucifixsion. His suffering. What he’s saying is that he’s not ready yet, to die. His hour hasn’t come yet. And that of course is how the Lamb of God, the Messiah, the King of Isreal will overcome the power of shame, overcome that block that keeps us from the joy of living. How will Jesus begin to heal our shame. He shares it with us. He takes it on. The cross was the most shameful thingimaginable. Totally inappropriate for church. To say to his followers. Come to the cross. Where shame is exchanged for love.

It's so simple to start on a path back home to the feast. Sometimes not so easy, but it is simple to understand. The best place it usually happens is at AA meetings. What’s the first thing you do when you introduce yourself. You say, “Hi, I’m whatever your name is, and I have a problem”. See, when your blocked from the kingdom your ashamed of your problems. But in the kingdom when you stand up and say you have a problem, you know what happens everybody cheers. It’s a whole different world. No shame for having problems. And now you’re beginning to understand what it means to be welcomes to the feast of joy. Just beginning.

Pretty soon here we’re going to have a baptism. And what it is is the gift of the feast of God’s love. It’s the foundation for life. You can’t choose it. The Word comes to you from God. From now on, whenever you come before God, there is no shame, only love. It’s a life long journey to understand, and we never quite get it in this world do we? We will always struggle with the need to put on a good appearance. The feast is always a little too much for us. It’s hard to trust it. Good thing then, that we can trust in God and His Word. You my child, with you I am well pleased. Amen.