
What is That to Me and to You? What Have I Got to Do with You?

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by Dean Sam Candler**

The question can be asked in several ways. “What is that to me and to you?” “So what?” “What have I got to do with you?” “Who cares?”

Most of us remember the general highlight of what happened when Jesus was a guest at a wedding in Cana. At the beginning of the Gospel of John, that’s where Jesus simply turned water into wine. Something in us delights in that act, that Jesus would perform a wonder for the sake of a party, at a party rejoicing in such a sacred commitment as marriage. (Others of us observe with delight that Jesus turned the water into wine, not grape juice!)

But it’s that opening question of Jesus—a statement, really—that made me pause when we heard that story on the weekend of our country’s observance of Martin Luther King, Jr. In fact, that question of Jesus relates to most of us, no matter what weekend it is. “What is that to me and to you?” (John 2:4).

In a way, that first recorded interchange of Jesus and Mary in the Gospel of John seems rather like the interchange of almost any mother and her older son, especially as the son is beginning to live into his own identity. “They have no wine,” declares the mother, not exactly asking the son to do anything about it, but certainly raising the issue. (And Jesus then calls his mother, “Woman,” a title I do not recommend that any child call their mother!)

What’s even more diffident than the title “Woman,” however, is that question of Jesus. It sounds like the question we have heard so many times in our lives. We might have asked it of our parents at some time or another, when a difficult situation has arisen. “So what?” we ask. “Who cares?” “What has that got to do with you and me?”

Apparently, those words of Jesus can also be translated in an even more careless-sounding way, even an antagonistic way. They might also be translated as “What have you got to do with me?” or “What have I got to do with you?” That is the way a young person might explore his independence from his parents. We have heard it many times, and we might have often said it.

“What have I got to do with you?” becomes the question we sometimes ask our neighbors, when they are behaving in difficult ways. Cultures, and even countries, ask the question when we do not want to get involved in something that looks complicated and awkward. “What does that have to do with me?” “So what?”

During the ministry of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.—and afterwards when our country was discussing how to set aside a day of remembrance for him—that question was often asked by white people. “What has the plight of African-Americans to do with my situation? Why should I care?” One of the primary and most powerful elements of King’s teaching was that justice for one group of people, blacks in America, was just as important for whites as it was for blacks. True justice for one also means, finally, justice for all. All of us needed, and need, equal rights for African-Americans.

And so, Jesus, too, asks the question at the very beginning of his ministry (it is the first story, and sign, mentioned in the

Gospel of John). Then, as if in answer, Jesus takes two elements that might seem different: water and wine. What has this got to do with that? What does water have to do with wine? With that seeming opposition, Jesus produces a sign of unity, and a sign of joy and abundance. “What have you got to do with me? What has water got to do with wine?” Jesus provides joy and wonder—and breadth and love—out of that initial distinction. Further, it is probably no coincidence that this sign occurs at a wedding, when two distinct people are being united as one.

That event is called a “sign” in the Gospel of John, and it does not really mean what we think of today as a “miracle.” In fact, the word “miracle” comes from a word that really means “something to wonder at.” Jesus performed “signs and wonders,” which means they were about something else than simply overturning some natural, physical law. They were signs and wonders.

It is in this way that the Gospel of John begins the actual ministry of Jesus. It may be that the larger question being addressed in that second chapter is the difference between divinity and humanity. “What has God to do with humanity?” “What has this to do with that?” Maybe it is God who asks, “What have I got to do with humanity?” “What have I got to do with you?”

Well, Jesus is that sign. Jesus is himself the sign that God does care, that God can provide not just sufficiency, but abundance in times of great need. God can provide unity and joy out of mere water that becomes wine. Yes, even God asks, “What have I got to do with you?” And God answers that question in Jesus, who is both fully divine and fully human, the sign of the all-embracing love and wonder of God. Welcome to the wedding party!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

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