

Sermon for January 20, 2019 – “The Good Wine”

2nd Sunday of Epiphany, Year C – Texts: John 2:1-11

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A cop pulls over his pastor when he notices him swerving. As the officer approaches the window, he notices a bottle in a brown bag on the seat. The officer says, “Pastor, I pulled you over for swerving back there. You haven't been drinking have you?” “Why no officer, why would you ask that?” “Well I noticed the bottle on the seat next to you.” “Oh, that's just holy water.” “Okay, pastor, so why is it in a bag?” “Well, that's to protect it from the sun's rays.” “Mind if I take a sip?” “Not at all.” As the officer puts the bottle to his lips and takes a drink, he immediately spits it out. “Pastor, this is wine.” The pastor, “Praise the Lord, He's done it again!”

On the third day of the wedding in Cana they ran out of wine. It might seem strange to be talking about a party running out of wine today. Daily life has become serious business, stress filled and difficult business. So talking about a miracle where Jesus turns some water into wine at a wedding sounds almost trivial. Yet, despite being known mostly for its poor party planning, Cana is a place where life is serious, stress filled and difficult too. Cana knows the dangers of the world. They too worry if there'll be enough food on the table. They worry about keeping a roof over their heads. They worry about bills and taxes, work and family. Cana was a small town in the middle of nowhere. They lived under and paid taxes to the Romans, to Herod, to the Temple, to the Synagogue, to the local authorities and soldiers. And here they were trying to have a nice celebration for the community, trying to set a couple off on the right start for their marriage, to celebrate a bit in an otherwise dark, serious and difficult world. But on the third day of the wedding they run out of wine. Mary, Jesus and the disciples are in Cana for a wedding. Maybe they or one of the disciples is a relative but we're given no details. For the residents of Cana themselves this would've been a party for the whole community. Like lots of weddings today, especially Italian ones, the weddings of ancient Israel were big celebrations. It was expected that a fortune would be spent on the party. Wine and food were to flow for a week; literally seven days. The bridegroom was meant to be broke by the end of the party. The hospitality and celebration, the extravagance was meant to be a sign of blessing. If it was a good party, it would be blessed marriage. Except it is only day three in Cana and they have no wine. Mary points this out to Jesus in a way that only a mother could. And Jesus responds in only the way a son could **“Woman, what concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come.”** Jesus has different idea of timing than his mother. But she doesn't care. She tells the servants, **“Do whatever He tells you.”** Jesus seems to only to see a party that's been poorly planned, a party that's run out. But Mary sees something different. Mary knows that the wine has run out on day three, not even half way through. The wine might run out on a poorly planned party on day six but not day three. It's possible that they didn't know the wedding customs in Cana. It's also possible that the family was too poor to throw a proper wedding.

Maybe they didn't come together as people do here knowing that if everyone contributes a little to everyone else when the time comes for you to host a wedding the burden won't be so great. But the people of Cana would likely have known this and quite possibly had all already chipped in to the party. So it makes sense that the community is poor. Mary sees that they don't even have enough to have one party for some newlyweds. And herein lies the lesson for us today.

Mary and Jesus embody the moments of scarcity that we face every day. We know what it's like to feel the need for more, to fear running out, to not have everything you **need** let alone anything you **want**. How many of us know this feeling? It can weigh on us can't it? At home and at work. At the grocery store. At school. And, oh yeah, at church, especially at budget time! But this is just how our world operates and why we sometimes lie awake at night worrying anxious about what will happen. It's also a big reason why we work as hard as we do. We know that we're closer to running out than we like to admit. Running out of time, out of energy, out of patience, out of money, out of love, out of breath, out of life.

Running out is something we all fret about and yet it's connected to a much deeper fear. At the core of our being within all of us is a fearful sense. A fearful sense that if there's not enough for us, that if we run out, then we'll suffer. We'll lose. We'll be alone. We'll die. We fear not having enough often to the point where we can go crazy or want to just give up altogether. It's the fear of running out that makes us argue and fight with each other, that makes us stubborn and unable to see the needs of people around us. It's the fear of running out that makes us hold on with all our might; even when holding on is killing us!

So, it seems to me that when Mary pushes Jesus to act, even though He resists, it's because she **sees**. She sees that it isn't really about the wine or the party ending four days early. She sees that it's about a community. A community without much else to hold on to. A people without hope. If there's not enough wine, then there's not enough to eat or drink. There isn't enough to live on. The world will have overcome them. There is no future. No hope. Only death. She sees a community that needs something to celebrate, a community that needs hope, a community that needs to know that it has a future. And she knows the only person who can truly provide it. So, Mary presses the issue, not so much with Jesus, but with us. **"Do whatever He tells you."** Easy instructions for the servants but words that ought to take our breath away because in them lies our salvation.

As we face the challenges and struggles of our lives, as we try our best to move forward as a church there is hope. **"Do whatever He tells you."** This demands faith from us as it did the disciples that day. Faith that we, like they, really don't know how to give. But God does. Even when it doesn't seem like it's Jesus' hour, it is. And it isn't just an abundance of wine that Jesus provides. Instead, God breaks into the world. God comes to a small community that's been forgotten by everyone else and blesses the wedding, blesses the whole community. Because you see, and here's the thing, it's not about the **wine**. It's about the **blessing**.

It's about Christ's presence with them, there in that moment. Little has changed. God continues to show up in our lives not just at big things like weddings, but in the little things. God continues to break into our world here and now providing us with hope and a future.

Tell me if this sounds familiar, **“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on Me and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord.”** They are God's own words spoken to God's people through the prophet Jeremiah.

You know, I wonder, is it by accident that we meet on Sunday? A day when we're meant to be reminded of that other third day miracle. Just when it seemed that hope was gone and life seemed to have run out, God turned it into wonderfully new life. Better life. Abundant life. Eternal life. When all hope was lost God found us at the empty tomb. When we didn't seem to have a future, God gave all creation new life in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Here on this third Sunday of the new year, here in our world, here in our community, here in our church it might feel like our wine has run out or at least that we're running dangerously low. It might feel like there's no hope and no future, at least not one we can foresee. But God is revealing to us this Christ who brings new and abundant wine, who fill the jars of our hope, who makes sure that there will be a future because Jesus has saved the good wine until now, He has saved it for **us!**

Thanks be to God

Amen and amen.