

Rev. Janet R. Doyle

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Sunday, January 19, 2025

Scripture Reading: John 2: 1-11

Sermon: Extravagant Blessings

Years ago, when Johnny Carson was the host of *The Tonight Show*, he interviewed an eight-year-old boy. The young man was asked to appear because he had rescued two friends in a coalmine outside his hometown in West Virginia. As Johnny questioned the boy, it became apparent to him and the audience that the young man was a Christian. So Johnny asked him if he attended Sunday school. When the boy said he did, Johnny inquired, "What are you learning in Sunday school?" "Last week," came his reply, "our lesson was about when Jesus went to a wedding and turned water into wine." The audience roared, but Johnny tried to keep a straight face. Then he said, "And what did you learn from that story?" The boy squirmed in his chair. It was apparent he hadn't thought about this. But then he lifted up his face and said, "If you're going to have a wedding, make sure you invite Jesus!" The little boy was on to something. Weddings are a time of Joy and celebration and a lot of planning and preparations ahead of time. It seems to me as though Jesus loved to be with people and loved celebrations.

At the wedding, which Jesus attended in Cana of Galilee, there was great joy, but a problem developed. There was a shortage of wine. For a wedding to run out of wine was embarrassing for the family and for the bride and groom.

So Mary approaches Jesus and asks him to do something. His response? "Why do you involve me, woman?" Sounds harsh, so unlike him but no one wants to run out of food and drink for their guests at a party, let alone a wedding! It's always a bit challenging to estimate how much you'll need for the guests you've invited. Now picture planning for 7 days! Yes, 7 days. That's how long people celebrated with feasting, dancing, wine, and celebration at a wedding in Jesus' time. Even nowadays weddings in other cultures last for days and the bride has several dresses she changes into

over the several days of festivities. When we lived in Central Asia we attended a couple of weddings in which this was the case.

Apparently, at this particular wedding in Cana in Galilee, either people were really having a great time and drinking more wine than usual or maybe the wedding planner didn't plan so well. In fact, maybe there's a little humor in this passage of scripture when the person in charge of making sure things go smoothly goes to the bridegroom and says, "Hey...you've been holding out on us. Everyone knows you're supposed to serve the good wine first. You've kept the good wine hidden away until you had to use it."

If Jesus is called to make wine, he's going to make the best! Right? Jesus loves to give extravagant blessings.

We can probably assume that this was a rather large wedding! A lot of people must have been attending this event because when Jesus made wine, he went all out. He made more wine than we would expect anyone to make for a wedding or for any occasion for that matter!

The very large jars that Jesus uses in the miracle were ones used by attendees to wash and cleanse their hands according to purification practices. As the guests entered the wedding a servant would pour water in their hands to wash them. In using these jars, Jesus turns a tool for meeting an obligation under purity law into an extravagant blessing and celebration. Consider the scale of wine Jesus produces. If each of the jars only has 20 gallons of water in it, that's the equivalent of about 600 of our standard bottles of wine today. I've been to some weddings, but I've never been to one with 600 bottles of wine.

When Christ appears on the scene in each of the gospel stories, he comes to inaugurate a new era, a new order - God's reign fully and finally. In John, chapter 1, it says that Jesus comes "with grace and truth." And then by chapter 2, we have an example of what his coming with grace and truth looks like: he turns water into wine at a wedding. This water to wine miracle is inaugurating that new era. As we read in this passage, this is "the first of the signs" to reveal his glory, to show who he is and what he is about. "New Wine ushering in a New Way!"

The passage starts off with some words that should immediately get our attention but might be missed in a quick reading: "On the third day . . . a wedding." "On the third day" should alert Christians to the supreme event of

our faith: “on the third day, . . . he arose again from the dead.” “On the third day” - Easter! “On the third day” - darkness and death have no more power or victory. God reigns!

According to commentator Dale Bruner, the little phrase, “on the third day” throws “a Resurrection aura” over a simple story of a wedding in a nondescript town. There is much more going on here than a wedding, and water to wine. With Jesus on the scene - God is making a major point about who is in charge, what life is about, and God’s new way.

Wine running out at this wedding is clearly an embarrassment for the hosts, and a concern too to Jesus’ mother. No more wine could mean no more party - and that would create great disappointment to the bride and groom and all their guests.

But remember, this is not just about the wedding. The fact that the wine runs out is really a metaphor for so much more.

When Mary, Jesus’ mother says, “they have no more wine,” it could be a metaphor for anything that is sad or bad that emerges in our lives. This is how it often goes - we were celebrating but grief breaks in. We have been singing but now our thoughts turn to sadness.

When we hear the words “no more wine,” it is really a metaphor for the shift in life that invariably comes to all of us. We were happy but then loss, change, heartache came into our life.

Our scripture passage today is a story about a wedding and wine, but it is really a story about Jesus coming with grace and truth to make things right, to bring about life and light for all. And Jesus comes to call forth the best from our lives. Jesus gives to us extravagant blessings so that we will know his love for us.

This little story about a wedding and wine running out teaches us something very big, and important. As wonderful as the world is, what is going on falls far short of what God intends! Life as we know it, is nowhere close to the joy and hope that God intends for us. The wine is out - but not to worry - Jesus comes full of grace and truth. Jesus calls forth grace and truth from us, in our living and serving.

The depletion of the wine could be a metaphor of anything in our lives or world where we feel depleted, empty, lost. But not to worry because Jesus is on the scene to bless us, to redeem us, to bring light and life.

When we find ourselves with a dilemma, a crisis, an uncertainty, an unsettling situation, we need to turn to Jesus. In a column in the NY Times, David Brooks makes the case that “America is falling apart at the seams” (NY Times, January 13, 2022) His point: “all kinds of bad behavior are on the rise.” Teachers are facing terrific challenges. Drug use, and drug overdoses are escalating. Hate crimes are surging. The number of guns purchased has soared. And evidence shows increased hostility among citizens. We can see all this in our news as we see how many people treat each other.

Jesus comes to bring life and life in abundance through love and care, outreach and help, kindness and peace.

New wine - intends to point us in new ways - the Jesus way!

The final sentence of this passage: did you notice what happened? It says, this was “the first of the signs” and they believed and put their trust in him. Those who saw this miracle get on board with the new way of Jesus.

Can we do that? Can we see Jesus in our midst and put our trust in him, and become the kind of people he calls us to be? How much does our fractured and divided world need this? We put our trust in him, and we keep striving, with God’s help, to be the loving, serving, listening, peaceful people of God! This is our ongoing, living, daily endeavor, like breathing and walking to become more and more the loving, serving, caring people of God.

That’s why Jesus came to earth in the first place, as in chapter one of John verse 14 declares, “The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” That’s why God became a man, so man could see the glory of God. Verse 18 explains, “No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.”

That’s what Jesus did all the days He spent on planet earth. He revealed what God is like. He revealed His glory. And that’s what He did on day one. He did what He did to make known His glory.

This miracle seems rather unimportant in the grand scheme of things. Jesus isn’t saving a life. He isn’t giving sight to the blind or helping the deaf to hear. He isn’t feeding five thousand or casting out any demons. But this miracle teaches us so much about the life of faith, because it provides us

with this powerful image for what a life with Jesus looks like: It is extraordinary, and it is extravagant. It is a special wine, not just water anymore. Life with Jesus turns our plain old water life into a rich, wonderful, extravagant blessed life. This may not be the most needed of Jesus' miracles, or the most practical, but it is essential because it is the first of his signs, revealing his glory.

Jesus turned water into wine, and it was a great sign. One that we still remember, all these years after it happened. But if we really want to see a sign involving wine there is no greater sign than Jesus inviting us to partake of the bread and cup at his table. When we give thanks and remember the cup that is the new covenant in Jesus' blood, shed for us and for all people for the forgiveness of sin. It turns out that it is not wine that makes life extraordinary and extravagant but Jesus' love for us. Jesus who is the Lamb of God whose blood is shed for us all, for the forgiveness of sin, for life and for salvation.

The wine had gone dry. It is in that feeling of despair Jesus provides not just wine, but an extravagant blessing. God is still acting and involved in our lives. Turning water into wine tells us that God isn't done with us, there are still blessings in store. It was the best wine saved for last. God is a God of Extravagant Blessings and love.