

Sermon. John 2:1-11. January 20, 2019. Snow Storm Sermon.

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. John 2:1-11 NRSV

I love this story that we have here from John this morning because Jesus is acting like a, very human, young man who in some ways appears to be arguing with his mother just for the sake of an argument.

Although I am not trying to say that Jesus is acting like a teenager I can't help but see the comparison as he tells his mother, "You must not tell me what to do" as she suggests to him that they are out of wine at the wedding feast where they are attending. We must look at this more closely, because Mary isn't saying that you have to do something about this, she is just stating a simple fact. They are out of wine. However, Jesus goes on the defensive and basically says, "mother, stop telling me what to do, I'm not your little boy anymore and I can make decisions for myself."

I can just hear Jesus saying this in this way, but then it is almost as if he calms himself down with his next sentence as he states, “My time has not yet come.” First, we realize that Jesus’ mother recognizes that Jesus has the power to do something about this situation. Second, we see that Jesus is also realizing that maybe it just isn’t time for him to begin performing miracles yet.

Timing and abundance are two themes that intertwine in this story from the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. Jesus has not yet begun teaching or working wonders among the people, yet his mother has confidence that he can help when a crisis arises at the wedding of a friend. This short but beautiful text provides us a glimpse of the relationship of Jesus and his mother and their “human side” who had friends who liked to have a good time.

Now, although Mary and Jesus sort of argue about what Jesus is going to do, he does respond to the need at hand with an act of ordinary, earthy compassion for the hosts who are in a terrible predicament, but with anything but an ordinary response. And Jesus did it in time even though he said it wasn’t quite the right time yet.

So timing, and the plan, no matter how important, take a back seat to human need at the moment, as they often would throughout Jesus’ ministry. How fitting that the hour of Jesus is indeed arrived in that moment when the reign of God breaks in, as it does in every wonder worked by Jesus and indeed, by his entire life, death, and resurrection—and it arrives not in an hour of triumph but in a moment of need.

When we plan and make the decisions for what we think is the best way to live out our ministry, it seems that sometimes God laughs and says, not yet. It is very difficult for a person like myself to sometimes “let go and let God” as the saying goes because I like to plan and I need to be thinking ahead. Yesterday, at the SV Food Pantry distribution, the organization was asked if we could take some extra supplies from the Berks County Food Bank (which is where our food comes from) because they are anticipating an increase in need due to the government shut-down and other factors at the beginning of this year. We were supplied with over 1000 lbs. of meat and enough food for 100 families (which is a little bit extra). I was handing out the cards as people came in and I handed out number 101 at 11 am when the distribution should end. We gave away almost all of the food that we had with a few things left for emergencies that we get throughout the month. We also had 19 new families/individuals register which is usually only less than 5 each month.

We planned. We got extra. We gave it away. The Leesport Community has a need and by a number of congregations working together, we are able to fulfill that need.

Now, I love that this Gospel story shows us the human side of Jesus and Mary. I love that they are at a party, a wedding feast, where they are drinking wine and enjoying themselves. Who could have realized that the truly good and abundant “wine” is Jesus himself? We must see the importance of the steward, or headwaiter, whose punch line in the story may reveal more than the headwaiter himself understood. Saving the best wine

for last is unusual, the steward says, and we see that God hasn't just saved the best wine for last but, more significantly, God's "very best gift to Israel and the world." Still, we don't do much better than the steward ourselves when we enjoy God's good gifts but we fail to recognize their source in the Creator's Love.

The idea of abundance is quietly in the background of this scene, as it will be in the story of the multiplication of loaves and fishes, another response to the everyday but immediate, pressing human need of the people. This overflowing gift, six stone jars of wine when just one might have been enough is a sign, too. First, the jars are special because they hold the water used in the religious purification rituals. They are large, too, each one holding 15-25 gallons, and they're filled to the brim. We see the symbolism of this needed wine as a fulfillment of real human thirst, like our deepest hunger, is for the life God offers us, the close, living relationship with God who loves us.

It seems that in our own day, our spiritual hunger and thirst are so great that we fill our lives with materials things in a futile attempt to satisfy those needs. There are many televangelist preachers that preach the prosperity gospel. The idea that God wants us all to have lots of stuff and bless us abundantly. That may be true to a point. God does want to bless us abundantly, but we don't need to have stuff in order to be abundantly happy.

When was the last time that you took a good look at your family and you truly felt how blessed you were? When was the last time that you recognized that even though you have a car that is ten years old and just about falling apart that you have so many great

memories of transporting your wife to have your first child or driving your kids or grandkids to their soccer games or their dance or piano recitals? Do we see the joy in our lives as God's abundant blessing? And what then can we do with that abundance?

The notions of paying it forward and of crowd-funding for people (strangers) in need through online donation sites, and even the sharing of stories, and inspiring words on social media; all suggest a hunger and thirst for meaning that includes at least some joy and happiness, not just repentance for sin and sorrow about the suffering of the world. We see the suffering in the world. We pray about the natural disasters and the people dealing with the snowstorm; the violence in the streets of many of the cities in America; the people trying to flee from their country to any place else that will allow them a better life of safety and opportunity, but if all we are doing is praying, what tangible difference can we be making? How do we see plain jars of religious water and turn that into wine? How can we take the basic things that we have and turn them into something much greater?

How do we take our supply of people to use their gifts for the church? How can we strengthen our own faith so that we may share our faith with others?

I want you all to begin to think about the answer to this question. What is the immediate needs of the church? I am not talking about how much money we need this week to pay the bills or what report needs to come in for the annual meeting in February. I am talking about the church universal. The church that is the place where I believe is

the beginning to the end of violence and senseless death; poverty; homelessness; hunger; racism; bigotry, sexism and so many other “isms” and issues that we are dealing with in our country and in our world. Many people say that things changed when we took God out of the schools. I don’t necessarily believe that is the problem, but what I do think is that we need to bring the church to the community because if the church isn’t visible as a living, breathing organization, than people won’t know that we are here for them, for the hurt, for the lonely and the hungry.

Mary saw a need at a party. She told her son that he should basically just do something about it. Like some typical sons, he fought with her about it, but then something must have made him realize that the time to take action was now. It is the time for us to take action. God worked through Jesus to bring a miracle to the party. God works through us to bring miracles to the world through our abundance and our love and our support of one another to this community and beyond. I will leave you with this question on this snowy morning when we are sitting at home safely and watching the ice form on the roads and our sidewalks: What might be YOUR miracle that you can offer or we can offer to the world through our congregation and our ministry? Amen.