

St. James UCC Havertown, PA
January 20, 2019 | John 2:1-11
Rev. Emily Garcia Livingston | "Trust that God IS Able"

Tomorrow is the national holiday for the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in honor of his birthday. He is respected by many as a modern-day prophet; a man who spoke truth to power; and a person who put his faith in God into action. Dr. King believed that every member of humanity was linked to one another by virtue of every one of us being made in the image and likeness of Almighty God.

As one of our nation's civil rights leaders and martyrs, we remember his legacy of non-violent resistance and his work to uplift all people, especially those living in poverty. Dr. King was a man of faith who trusted in God and the power of love that could break the shackles of hatred and fear. He made many famous remarks and one of them is: "Faith is taking the first step even when you can't see the whole staircase." That statement is all about trust.

We're in the third week of our series called "Life in the Light" where we are looking at how we can live in the light of Christ. The first week we talked about obedience, the second week we discussed humility and today we're going to look at how trusting God helps us to live in the light. So back to King's quote: "Faith is taking the first step even when you can't see the whole staircase."

This quote reminds me of a recent movie I saw -- and it just so happens to be another movie starring Sandra Bullock. I do watch movies with other actors in them...I really do.... So how many of you have seen "Bird Box?" I promise I'm not going to give anything away. Sandra Bullock's character in this movie is named "Malorie" and she has to stay blindfolded when she is outdoors. Malorie has two young children who are also blindfolded whenever they go outside and they have to trust each other and listen to Malorie's voice in order to stay safe.

There's this part in the movie where Malorie and the kids are in a canoe in the middle of a river and Malorie knows that there are rapids and a waterfall up ahead. When they started their journey on the river, Malorie told the kids that at some point, they were going to have to remove their blindfolds so that they can navigate the rapids. As they approach the rapids, Malorie has a sudden change of heart...she can hear that they're in the midst of the rapids but she tells the children that they're going to keep their blindfolds on because they're going to be alright... Malorie decides in that moment to trust her instincts that they're going to somehow survive

the rapids and the waterfall. This goes against all rational thinking because they're in the middle of the river, approaching a water fall, and it makes no sense; but she trusted that somehow, they were going to make it. That is an example of trusting when you can't see the end...when you can't see how things are going to unfold ...when you can't see the whole staircase.

And that's how life can be for us at times, even when we put our trust in God. We don't always understand what's happening to us; things happen that are out of our control at work; or our health is failing; or someone we love is going through something difficult; but we move on daily with life trusting that God will get us through the day and that somehow, God will give us the strength to repeat it the next day...and the next day...and the next and so on and so forth. Sometimes, life can be so hard that we literally can only manage life by taking it minute by minute, hour by hour and then, by the grace of God, we see that we've actually made it through one more day. Trusting God isn't always easy or comfortable or rational but it's one of the things that we can do in order to live in the light of Christ.

In today's Gospel reading, we heard about the miracle that Jesus performed at the wedding in Cana, and according to John's gospel account, this was Jesus' first miracle. There's so much in this passage, but I'm going to highlight Mary. Mary isn't mentioned by name, which is interesting, and she isn't the main focus of the story, but her actions are noteworthy. We don't know how it is that she learned that the wine has run out nor why she is telling servants at the party what to do, but we see a very active and involved Mary. Was this the wedding of a relative or a close friend? Was she tasked with being one of the helpers of the affair? We don't know. We also see Jesus at this wedding with some of his disciples and I'd say it's reasonable for us to imagine that Jesus is there to celebrate with the newly wedded couple and their guests at this festive occasion.

All of a sudden, we learn that there's a problem. Somehow, they've run out of wine. In the historical context of this story, that would have been a huge embarrassment for the family of the groom and the groom himself. The groom and groom's family were financially responsible for the wedding celebration and festivities, so running out of wine early would have been a horrible way for the marriage to begin. The groom and his family would have been severely shamed and dishonored in front of all their guests. The bride and her family would have also experienced shame and dishonor by virtue of their connection to the groom's family. The entire community where they lived would have also learned of this awful thing.

Somehow, Mary learns that they've run out of wine. She immediately takes action and she goes and tells her son, Jesus. Now Jesus is minding his business, enjoying himself at the wedding and Mary, his mother, comes to Him saying that they've run out of wine.

Jesus' response to Mary is somewhat unusual. He tells her (v.4) "Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come." For us reading this, that's a peculiar and some would even say -- that's a rude way to talk to your own mother. We see Jesus using the same word "woman" when He is dying on the cross and He tells John to take Mary as his own mother and for Mary to take John as her son. Biblical scholars have all sorts of theories as to why Jesus spoke to Mary this way and what it meant but what I find remarkable is Mary's response. One possibility is that Jesus is using language here that distances Mary from Him as His mother. He is her Savior and so He responds in this way. He's foretelling the reality of His future, that He will be put to death, that His hour is coming but it is not now and therefore, this is not a major event.

The text doesn't tell us that Mary was upset with Jesus or that she was offended by His response. And Mary doesn't appear to react to this statement in anger at all. We don't see her respond to Jesus verbally, but the next thing she does is she tells the servants (v5) "Do whatever He tells you to do." I like to think that by this point in her life, Mary had lived a life of tremendous trust in God. Her journey into motherhood began with an amazing amount of courage and faith. I find that many Protestant traditions generally shy away from saying too much about Mary because they want to maintain a firm line between how they talk about Mary and how Catholics venerate Mary.

As a former Catholic myself, I find that we Protestants do this at times to our detriment. We risk missing out on seeing Mary as a person of great faith. Mary exemplifies a life that trusted God when nothing made logical sense. She trusted God as a young teen when believing what the angel Gabriel told her meant that she would likely be ostracized from her own community as promiscuous and a sinner and that this would possibly destroy her relationship and future with Joseph. Mary's faith is what blessed her to be able to raise God's son. And Mary learned how to trust God through all of it. It's interesting that she didn't even ASK Jesus to do something, she just went to Jesus and told Him the need with the expectation that HE was going to fix the situation.

In this story, we see that same amazing faith as she simply tells her son, "they are out of wine." Mary brings her request, the need of the hour, directly to God. She doesn't panic or beat around the bush or tell other

people what happened...she goes straight to Jesus and tells Him what has happened believing that HE is ABLE to do something about it! Oh what trust in God Mary displays here and what we can learn from Mary. How often do we panic or tell everybody else about our troubles before we take the time to go directly to God FIRST with our need? And do we go to GOD believing that GOD IS ABLE to do the things that we need most?

In addition to demonstrating great trust in God, Mary demonstrates deep concern for the family hosting the wedding. Her request wasn't selfish or self-serving; it was a request to help a family avoid shame and dishonor. This was a request to help the family AND the community that gathered in celebration. Mary didn't know what Jesus was going to do, but she believed that He would do something to fix the problem. She went to God with her statement and told the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them to do. She trusted God and told others to obey God.

I believe she knew from her own life experience that trusting and obeying God go hand-in-hand sometimes. Even though Jesus responds to Mary in a seemingly dismissive way, He goes to the servants and tells them to fill six jars with water and each of the jars held 20 to 30 gallons of liquid. The servants did as Jesus instructed them and then Jesus tells them to draw liquid from the jar and to take it to the "MC" of the party. When the servants did this, the MC tasted it was wine and declared that this was the best wine yet. The MC then went and praised the groom for having such good wine available while the festivities were well underway.

I want to highlight three things that this miracle shows us about Jesus:

- He cares about the needs of people – He knew what it would mean for the groom and his family if they had run out of wine. Jesus also knew that Mary cared about protecting the family from shame and dishonor.
- Jesus blesses us with abundance and good things– not only did they have wine, but it was the best tasting wine the MC tasted. They had between 120 and 180 gallons of wine to carry them through rest of the celebration -- more wine than they needed.
- Jesus was a social person – he wasn't a hermit living off in a cave somewhere cut off from society. Jesus was a part of his community. We see his humanity in this story; Jesus was a part of this wedding celebration where folks were gathered to celebrate the union of two people and two families.

Life in the light of Christ is possible when we choose to trust God. We have a choice whether we trust God or not. When we choose to trust God, it doesn't mean that we won't have troubles OR problems; what it does mean is that when we experience trouble or problems, we are anchored in the belief that God loves us and that God is with us through it all. Trusting God as we navigate life reminds us that we are not *alone* and that God *alone* is sovereign. Trusting God gives us the courage demonstrated by people of faith like Mary and Dr. King to believe in God's promises and to know that GOD IS with us and ABLE to do exceedingly and abundantly above all that we could ever ask or think. Amen.