

“When the Wine Runs Out”

Date: January 20, 2019

Place: Lakewood UMC

Texts: Matthew 9:14-17; John 2:1-11

Occasion: Epiphany 1, Year C

Themes: Hope, Miracles, Friends, Optimism, Determination, God’s glory

In Jesus’ time, Jews attached great importance to the high moments of life. Thus, a wedding was not just a brief ceremony, but an experience shared by the entire community. The typical wedding could last up to seven days. The ceremony would begin on a Tuesday night at midnight.

After the wedding the father of the bride would take her to every house so that everyone might congratulate her. It was a community experience. Weddings were a time of great joy, especially where there was much poverty and hard work. To run out of food and wine would have been a terrible embarrassment.

Years ago, when Johnny Carson was the host of *The Tonight Show*, he interviewed an 8-year old boy. The young man was asked to appear because he had rescued two of his friends in a coal mine outside his home in West Virginia. As Johnny interviewed the boy, it became obvious 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 asked him, “What are you learning in Sunday school?” “Well,” the boy replied, “last week our lesson was about when Jesus went to a wedding and turned water into wine.”

The audience roared with laughter. But with a straight face, Johnny asked the boy, “And what did you learn from that story?” 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 indeed a time of great joy. And we should invite Jesus not just to the wedding, but also to

marriage as well.

At the wedding which Jesus attended in Cana of Galilee, there was great joy, but a problem developed. There was a shortage of wine. Not only was it a social embarrassment, but it was also a symbol. For a wedding to run out of wine was an omen that there was little chance of this particular marriage reaching its full potential. Maybe joy was not meant for this couple

How many weddings end in divorce 6 months later, 2 years later, 10 years later, 40 years later? What do you do when the wine runs out? Let us use this event in the life of Jesus as a metaphor – for the times in life when we run out of joy, when we run out of hope, when we run out of faith. What do we do when the wine runs out?

Where do we turn when success doesn't seem to be enough? How do we respond when, on a Friday afternoon, the boss calls us into the office and says, "I'm sorry, but we're going to have to let you go?" What happens when we put all of our faith in the stock market, and it crashes?

Where do we turn, when the man or the woman with whom you have shared your life for years, leaves you for someone else? What happens when the wine runs out? I'd like to offer four suggestions.

First – turn to your friends. Jesus went to the wedding of Cana that day, not to perform a miracle, but simply to be with friends. We all need friends who share life with us – in life's joys and in life's sorrows. Someone once said, "If you haven't cried together with someone, then you ain't really friends."

When Harry Truman was thrust into the presidency after the death of FDR, Sam Rayburn gave him some fatherly advice. "From here on out, Harry, you're going to have lots of people around you. They'll try to put a wall around you and cut you off from any ideas but theirs. They'll tell you

what a great man you are, Harry. But you and I both know you ain't."

Later on, when Sam Rayburn discovered he was quite ill, he announced to the House of Representatives that he was going home to Texas for medical tests. Some people wondered why he didn't stay in Washington where there were some great medical facilities.

He supplied the answer when he told another congressman by the name of Jim Wright, He said, "Bonham Texas is a place where people know it when you're sick. And they care when you die." *Those* are friends.

Jesus put great emphasis on friendships. He ministered to his friends and he was ministered to by his friends. Surely Jesus' mother, Mary must have been a friend of the bride and groom, because she cared enough to intervene on their behalf. In your own life, when the wine runs out, don't try to handle life's problems all by yourself. Remember your friends. Your true friends will be there for you, even if it's just to listen.

What do we do when the wine runs out? My second suggestion is not to give up. Sometimes the wine runs out for all of us. We face shortages in life – a shortage of courage, of wisdom, of strength or of faith. Quitting may be the easiest thing to do.

But let me tell you about someone who didn't quit. He's a baseball player by the name of Babe Ruth. It is seldom noted that Babe Ruth missed the ball frequently: over and over and over again. In fact, he struck out 1,330 times, a record in futility unapproached by any other player in the history of baseball. But he didn't quit.

And now, what people remember about him is that he hit 714 home runs, a record unequalled for 40 years. Someone once asked him the secret of his success at the plate. He replied, "I just kept goin' up there and I kept swingin' at 'em." In other words, he didn't quit.

On the other hand, there is the story of Earnest Hemmingway, well known for his book, “The Old Man and The Sea.” He was a Nobel Prize winner, and a person who went for it all. He was a newspaper reporter, an ambulance driver during World War II, involved in the Spanish Civil War, and a friend to bullfighters as well as authors.

He did it all. And when he did it, he did it to the fullest. In a manner of speaking, he enjoyed the wine of life. But there came a day when the wine ran out. One Sunday morning he went down to his basement, took out a shotgun and killed himself.

Hemingway took the easy way – he quit. What are you going to do when the wine runs out? I urge you not to quit. Get back up there at the plate and keep swinging.

What are you going to do when the wine runs out? My third suggestion is to choose optimism. In his second year at college, actor Martin Short lived at home, helping to take care of his sick mother. Listen to what he says about this tragic moment:

“When my mother died at the end of my sophomore year, I stopped and took stock of my life. There was this real sense that my childhood was officially over. I had decided that I wanted to be an actor. I knew I was loved as a kid. And you know, the thing you can always rely on, your core person, comes from your family’s attention and love.

When my mother got sick and I’d see her fight to survive, it gave me an early view of bravery and what life is about. I was about to prepare for it. Your mother dies, and you’re 18, and you face a choice. Are you going to take drugs, become a drunk? Or, are you going to try to become more spiritual? I thought, “why not go with the thing that seems more positive?”

Then he thought for a moment, “Why do I tend to be optimistic?”

And then he answered himself, “Because the alternative is just crushing to my soul.”

What happens when the wine runs out? I urge you, strive to stay positive. Strive to be an optimist. Choose hope over despair. I know it’s not always easy. But I encourage you, choose to be an optimist.

My final suggestion to the question, “what do you do when the wine runs out?” is this. Turn to Jesus. It’s my last suggestion but it should be the first thing we do.

Jesus met the need that day, and more, with six 30-gallon stone jars – 180 gallons of wine. No wedding party could drink that much wine. And here’s the point – no need on earth can exhaust the grace of God. There is super-abundance in the grace of Jesus.

Grace always does more than expected. Look at the symbolism. The miracle involves six stone jars which held the water for the Jewish rites of purification. The number six meant incompleteness, just as the number seven meant completeness.

Jesus took an imperfect vessel for purification and used it as a sign for the new wine of the gospel of grace. The steward of the feast pronounced the new wine better than the wine they already had. In Jesus there is a new gospel of grace: new wine! new life! vivid, sparkling, exciting! Jesus is the one who has come to give the new wine of the kingdom of God. What do you do when the wine runs out? You turn to Jesus!

This is the story of the wedding at Cana. Jesus “manifested his glory” the gospel says, “and his disciples believed him.” The glory of Christ is the power of Christ to adorn and beautify, to transform and hallow the human heart. May he work that most precious miracle in all of us. Amen.