

Sermon 1-17-10 John 2:1-11

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1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 9 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 10 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." 11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Do you believe in miracles? Some people get hung up on the miracle in this story. It fills them with questions and doubt: How did he do that, water into wine? Come on now, that just isn't scientifically possible. Other people insist that if you can't affirm miracles as actually happening, then you aren't a true believer.

And yet, either questioning how water can become wine or insisting that it did will ultimately keep us stuck on the surface of this story. Is it possible to set our questions and insistences aside for the moment, and let this gospel story speak to us at a deeper level? Perhaps we might even be drawn to glimpse God's same transforming power at work in our lives, our congregation and our world.

In over scrutinizing of the miraculous, we might easily overlook some subtle, but very important, connecting links in this story. John has been pacing the timing of his gospel stories together with a series of on the next day this, and on the next day that. Here he breaks that pattern by saying, "On the third day." Now what other story of Jesus do you know with a very important happening, on the third day?

Jesus responds to his mother's comment that they have no wine by saying, "my hour has not yet come." All through John's gospel references to the coming hour point towards Jesus' death and resurrection.

I've long been intrigued by this little exchange between Jesus and his mother. What was she implying by telling him that they have no wine? Was she perhaps hinting that it's time to go; the wine has run out, the party is over? Jesus mother's presence in this story is itself another connecting link, as she only appears in one other place in this gospel, at the cross standing next to his beloved disciple, when Jesus says to her, "Woman, here is your son."

It's not clear if his mother had any idea what Jesus was going to do when she told the servants to do whatever he asks, but she must have sensed that Jesus was up to something. He was up to

something. He was doing that very thing that is at the center of all that he's about. He was doing the very thing that God never tires of doing. He was bringing life from death.

Wedding celebrations in Jesus day usually lasted seven days, but this wedding celebration was over. When the wine is gone, the party is dead. It's time for all the friends and relatives to go home. It's over. But, Jesus, in effect, resurrects the party. He transforms common everyday water into wine, the best wine, so the celebration can continue. John tells us that this was a sign that Jesus did, to reveal his glory, and his disciples believed in him. Peter Gomes says that even more miraculous than the water into wine is the transformation going on within Jesus' disciples, a miracle that has possibilities of being repeated right here now this very morning.

This story opens our eyes of faith to see how Jesus continues the transforming work of bringing back to life all the dead parts of our lives. It opens our eyes of faith to trust in God's abundant providing us with all we need. It allows us to let go of all our striving to save ourselves and to let God work a miracle within us.

Marriage in the Scripture is commonly used as a metaphor for the relationship between God and God's people, and I think that this story is no exception. The transforming power of Jesus at work within us strengthens our bond with God. When the water turns into wine within us, we can't help but to celebrate. Tears of healing and joy flow together, as the abundance of a life lived in the light of God's love threatens to burst our hearts and souls.

Have you ever felt really hurt and disappointed about some situation in your life, where it seemed that the party was over? Perhaps it was a broken relationship, or the loss of a job, or the loss of a beloved friend or family member. Maybe it was a struggle with addiction or illness, or loneliness. Maybe you're in the midst of something like that right now. Well, let me assure you that you're not alone, and that the party is not over. Jesus, resurrection power continues to transform our lives, as the wine we share this day becomes his life-giving blood. The wedding feast goes on and on. It is the marriage feast, which has no end, for we soon discover that it is our very own union with the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world that we're celebrating.

Six stone jars containing 20 or 30 gallons means over a hundred gallons of wine. Such abundance sure ought to keep any party going for quite a while.

When we lack trust in the Lord's abundant provisions, we're apt to imagine that the party is over. I've even heard some comments to that effect about this congregation. Ten years ago as two congregations converged into one there were many dreams about turning around the story of declining numbers in worship and membership. We envisioned much growth and flourishing of all sorts of programs and ministries. But that's not what happened. I don't think anyone foresaw the ideological clashes and the struggle that would ensue, and no one can deny the reality that instead of growing in numbers, we've shrunk.

Yet, I for one believe that the party is not over. Maybe one lesson that we needed to learn was that we can't pull it off on our own, no matter how strategically we plan, or how hard we try. This story shows us that it's not up to us to bring about transformation and change. It's natural to think in any given situation that since we got ourselves into this mess, it's up to us to get ourselves out. But, notice that Jesus didn't start an investigation about why the wine had run out

so soon, he didn't look for a culprit, or someone to blame for this unfortunate predicament. Instead, he made it possible for the celebration of life to go on. Each week he shows up in our worship with the same agenda. He forgives us our sin, puts to death the sinner, and gives us all new life, his life, so that the resurrection celebration might continue.

The party goes on, as the one who brings life from death turns our water into wine. The party goes on, when Jesus transforming power is at the very heart and center of our life together.

I believe that our Lord will fill us once again this day with the new wine of forgiveness and unity, and love. I believe that our Lord will continue to raise up humble leaders for this congregation who can put aside their own agenda to seek God's agenda. I believe that Jesus will keep showing up week after week with his transforming power to remind us that the party is not over. Taste and see; there is an abundance of wine. The celebration continues.

Today, in our Annual Meeting we will highlight and celebrate three different ministries that we've begun within the last 18 months. As we do so I invite you to see them not from the perspective of 'wow look at what we're doing,' but rather, 'wow, look what God is doing through us.' They are visible manifestations of water becoming wine right in our midst.

Throughout the week the thoughts and prayers of many have gone out to the people of Haiti, recovering from the devastation of a deadly earthquake. Some people question why God allows such suffering to take place, and may even conclude that there is no such thing as a caring God. Yet, with the eyes of faith, we can see God's care through the response of the global community to our brothers and sisters in Haiti. God is always present in depth of human suffering. Thus, water is being turned into wine in people's lives, even as they weep over their losses and bury their dead. Water is being turned into wine as we send our dollars and our prayers to our Haitian brothers and sisters in their great hour of need.

May this story of what Jesus did at that wedding in Cana open our eyes of faith to see the miracle of water becoming wine being repeated wherever God's at work bringing life from death. The only thing missing from it being reenacted right now in our midst are the six large stone water jars. So where are the containers this day in which God will turn the ordinary into something truly extraordinary? Where are the containers that he will fill with new wine to let the world know that the party is not dead and over? Where are the containers through which the glory of God's transforming power will be revealed this day?

How about if we each look within, and find one! AMEN