

January 16, 2022. Rev. Katheryn McGinnis

Let us pray,

Holy God, we need the guidance of your word. Help us be honest with ourselves and with you in this sacred moment of proclamation. Amen.

Our scripture for this morning comes from the Gospel of John, chapter 2, verses 1 through 11. Listen now for the word of the Lord.

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.

The word of the lord. Thanks be to God.

I love weddings. I think they're such a fun atmosphere of love and joy and just celebration.

Receptions are fun because you get to dance and hear embarrassing toasts and eat cake and just have a good time.

I'm the youngest in my family, and my rather large extended family, which has its drawbacks. But a big perk was that I grew up going to a lot of weddings as my older cousins got married.

Now that I am ordained, weddings take on a new meaning for me. You've probably heard that my sister is getting married in March and I'm going to officiate her wedding - my very first.

But what's so remarkable about weddings, is that they're universal.

Almost all cultures throughout history have rituals where two people are bound together and then there's a celebration.

Because of that, - the universality of weddings - when we hear this story in John's gospel today - which is the story of Jesus turning water into wine at a wedding - it's one of the few stories in scripture that we can almost perfectly picture ourselves there, right in the middle of this wedding in Cana.

Even though this story is thousands of years old.

Yes, while even though some things are different between weddings today and this wedding in Cana thousands of years ago, we all know what it is like to have fun at a wedding,

And thus we can all imagine the panic of the wine running out in the middle of the reception - maybe some of you even have experienced that panic - a crisis at a wedding or the reception.

This wedding in the Gospel of John comes after John the Baptist baptizes Jesus and Jesus gathers disciples, which means this wedding marks the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of John.

When Jesus turns the water into wine - it is the first miracle, or signs as John calls them, in the gospel - the first of 7.

So this story is a big deal.

The Gospel of John as a whole is quite unique. It has stories - like this one - that do not occur in the other gospels, and it also doesn't flow nicely like a narrative or an epic.

Instead, each of John's stories seem to stand alone - each like a painting of a beautiful scene rich with symbolism that you just want to stare at for hours because you're so drawn by its beauty.

Each painting revealing more of Christ's glory, so that, as chapter 20, verse 31 tells us, you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Scholars and historians believe that the Gospel of John was written late in the first century by a particular christian community that was undergoing a painful separation from the Jewish Society to which its members had belonged.

So it's not an accident that the beginning of Christ's ministry is at a celebration, and the first of signs is one of abundant generosity that keeps the celebration going.

It shows a God of joy, hope, and inclusivity.

John, in this story, clearly wants us to take note of the overwhelming generosity and abundance of Christ here by describing exactly just how much water was turned into wine - some 120 to 180 gallons worth.

Wine in scripture is a common symbol of God's grace, of the generosity of God's kingdom. Through turning this water into wine Jesus shows us a kingdom of overflowing abundance.

And just as water represents life, as Jesus turns that water into wine, Jesus shows that he is life in abundance, of divine generosity.

All in all, it is a story of joy - the incredible miracle that starts christ's ministry is without doubt one of celebration of this new life in Christ.

Yet, yet, in our world today - a world where for millions, 884 million to be exact, there is no access clean water, let alone fine wine. Where is this divine abundance, this overflowing generosity?

It's hard to look at this text where God turns water into wine and then not see that miracle around us.

Instead see a world where in the United States alone, over 38 million people live with food insecurity - a reality made visible by a global pandemic.

Where is Christ there? Why isn't he turning their water into wine?

In the text, if you read it carefully, it's actually the mother of Jesus (she isn't given a name in John) who notices the crisis first.

While she is one of the guests, so probably out there celebrating, she pays attention - she notices that the wine is running out and so she essentially tells Jesus to do something about it.

And what is his response - "My Hour has not yet come."

Now this foreshadows the resurrection and even further to into eschaton where Christ's glory will be fulfilled and God's kingdom come, so we know Jesus begins his ministry knowing what will happen to him.

Here at this wedding he seems fixated on that timeline and reluctant to look away from it - yet they need him now, in the present.

And it's Jesus' mother who makes sure he knows that.

It's difficult to think that without the Mother of Jesus nudging him that the wine would have run out...because we're desperate for the wine not to run out.

When you face the reality of 38 million, of 884 million, it feels like it already has....

But after his mother's nudge, Jesus does turn that water into wine - 180 gallons to be exact - and the only people who knew were his mother, his disciples, and the servants who filled the jars with water.

But no one else knew.

When the steward received the wine from the servants, he praised the bridegroom, assuming he had saved the good wine for last.

The guests and the couple were dancing away - didn't even know there was a miracle, maybe didn't even know there was a crisis to begin with.

The greek word for servant is a bit ambiguous. It can mean either servant or slave.

So maybe these servants were really servants hired for the occasion, but maybe they were slaves. Either way they were at the bottom of society and had the most to lose in this situation if the wine ran out. They would take the blame.

So it's to these servants that Christ's miracle of abundance is shown, by filling the jugs with all that water they take part in it. Even though everyone at that wedding reaped its rewards.

Perhaps this teaches us that in the present somber reality of the world, if we attune our sight to places and people where generosity seems lacking, where the wine has run out, we can see God's miracles, where generosity is abundant, playing out right before us.

We see people bravely nudging God, just like the mother of Jesus, who say we know the hour is not yet come, yet break into our reality with fine wine.

This story shows us that a measure of what will come to fulfillment only in the eschatological hour of glorification CAN be drawn into the time of present need.

In recent years, weddings seem to have turned into a giant industry rather than a celebration of love and a life together. Where the pressure to put on a perfect ceremony, a perfect reception, overshadows over the actual celebration. That is until Covid.

When the world stopped and terror seized the world - weddings were no exception.

All of a sudden wedding after wedding was cancelled. The wine had run out.

Yet, despite the terror of the present state of the world, despite the reality that a grand wedding, a perfect reception, then and there was not possible... some celebrations continued.

One friend I know had a zoom wedding. Everyone in their separate homes, even the couple and officiant in two separate places, yet the celebration and joy was there.

Another eloped with just a few friends on the beach. Another eloped with just immediate family in the forest surround by majestic trees.

And while I was not physically at any of these weddings, the love and joy was palpable.

Water turned into wine!

Maybe this wedding in Cana that begins Jesus' ministry challenges us to hold in tension moments of celebration and joy with the reality of the state of the world.

To perhaps when we're overwhelmed with all that we don't have, with how many places where the wine has run out. Maybe if we're more attuned to places that need generosity, we can see God's miracles, where generosity is abundant.

We need only be like the Mother of Jesus - both celebrating in joy, yet paying attention to the wine.

And nudging the Divine in faith that while the hour of glory where pain and suffering will be no more has not yet come, God still breaks into the present with a taste of what is to come - abundant wine.

And for that, thanks be to God. Amen.