

Second Sunday after Epiphany January 16 2022

John 2:1-11

Jesus, his disciples, and his mother are invited to a wedding. We don't know the relationship they have with the bride and groom or their families, but they are invited and attend this happy occasion. In that culture, weddings were a multi-day (up to a week-long) celebration. In the honor/shame society of first century Palestine, to run out of wine for the celebration would bring great shame upon the house that ran short. At the very least it was an inauspicious start, a bad sign you might say, for this new union.

Now, as guests, Jesus, his disciples and his mother have no formal responsibility at the wedding. They are there to celebrate and enjoy. But, when his mother learns of the impending shame upon the family, the wine is about to give out, she goes to her son, Jesus, telling him the problem, and then to the servants and lets them know, "If Jesus should happen to say something to you, do it."

While somewhat reluctant- the Jesus tells his mother his "hour" has not yet come-in the Gospel of John this "hour" refers to Jesus' passion, resurrection, and ascension- Jesus does tell the servants to fill these large jugs used for ritual purification with water, which they do- to the brim. And then to take some of the contents to the chief steward.

When the steward- who is probably not a paid position but more of a voluntary one for the wedding banquet (think the Maid of honor or Best Man)- tastes the wine, he's amazed. It's the best yet. He then goes to the bridegroom and congratulates him on this. "Most folks wait until the crowd is drunk and then

pour the lesser quality wine when they can't appreciate the difference. You've done the opposite!" I sometimes wonder what the response of the bridegroom was. Did he just look at him and say, "Yes... yes I did do that!" Was he confused? Did he just not care?

The only people who knew about this sign were Jesus, his mother, the disciples, and the servants who listened to what Jesus told them to do. Everyone else is clueless but benefits from the sign. Excellent wine, in abundance!

This is the first of what are seven signs in the Gospel of John. Signs are things that point us to something or give us important information. The octagonal red sign with white lettering on the corner of Main and Rowley tells us to, what? Stop! Now, the sign itself is not what is important. The information they give is what is important.

What does this sign, of water being turned into wine, point us to? What does it reveal? What is the response to that sign supposed to be?

The text says, the sign reveals Jesus' glory. This hearkens us back to John 1:14 which we heard for several weeks around Christmas, "the Word became flesh and lived among us,[this is Jesus] and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. The glory revealed in Jesus is of God's son, full of grace and truth. Grace, undeserved abundance from God. Truth, which Jesus says, later in John that he is, that he embodies.

And what is the proper response to this sign? The disciples lead the way to this. It is belief in Jesus.

This sign of Jesus points us to something about who God in Jesus is. What God in Jesus does and offers.

I like this story because it isn't flashy. Everything happens behind the scenes. Quietly, no fuss no muss.

There is no great panic or announcement, "There is no wine!" The horror!

The word gets out to the mother of Jesus who passes it along to her son. A point of information more than a direct request. But, just in case, she tells the servants-hey, if he happens to ask something of you, no matter how ridiculous it might seem do it.

When he decides to act, Jesus, again, does so behind the scenes. He doesn't make a big production of it. "Folks! Look at what miraculous thing I am going to do." Instead, a few quiet words to the servants. "Fills those jars with water, then take some of what's in it to the chief steward."

There is no sense that the majority of the party has any idea of what has just gone on. Rather, they blithely continue to celebrate the wedding of their friends, enjoy fellowship and some really good wine, and go about their lives. Unaware of how it happened, only that it is.

And isn't this the way God often works. Quietly, behind the scenes, through ordinary people and means just doing what Jesus says.

I have had many experiences of this kind of grace in my life. When I was in college and was coming off a very bad vacation (yes, a girl was involved) and I still remember the kindness of the waitress at a restaurant I was eating at. A few

minutes interaction in total, but a balm for me. Grace. Or any number of times in ministry when I have wondered if what I was doing, was dedicating my life to made any difference at all. Feeling defeated, and then within a few days receiving a phone call from a former youth group member letting me know she was going to seminary, and I was a major part of her doing that, or a note from someone thanking me for the support I had given their son, or just someone acknowledging the work that I was doing and its value and worth. A sign from God? Grace undeserved, truly.

In this social media age, when our every thought, meal, moment can be documented and shared, I wonder if we still ignore the quiet ways in which God works in our lives. What a gift it is to have eyes to see what is happening. To be in on the action as the disciples, the mother of Jesus, and the servants who filled the water jars are.

What do we learn about God in Jesus at this moment, about what God in Jesus does and offers? Weddings are a celebration of family, new beginnings, relationships. While they are special, they are also, ordinary. They happen all the time. God shows up to grace this little affair. God and the grace of God show up in the ordinariness of our lives. Do we take the time to spot it? Can we see the signs?

What does God provide into this wedding celebration, abundance! There are six stone jars, do you remember how many gallons each holds? Twenty to thirty. That's how many gallons of wine- because they were filled to the brim! 120 to 180 gallons. That's going on 1,000 bottles of excellent wine! Abundance indeed.

Jesus' extravagant miracle of changing the water into wine is a sign that in him, life, joy, and salvation have arrived. At the beginning of John's Gospel, the narrator told us that "in him was life, and that life was the light of all people" (1:4). And later in the Gospel, Jesus will tell us, "I have come that they might have life, and have it abundantly" (10:10). In Jesus we receive abundant life, filled with the good things. Family, relationships, fellowship, joy. Sometimes, like here, they come unexpectedly towards the end of the party, but they do come.

Jesus is the author of the sign, but it is made possible because the servants listened to Jesus and did what he said, even though it seemed ridiculous. How is filling these big jugs with water going to help us running out of wine? And it would have taken some doing, they didn't have a tap they could have just turned on. They would have had to make several trips to the well, which may have been located some distance away. But they do it. Then, they listen to Jesus when told to bring some of the contents of the container to the steward. Okay, how will bringing water to him help?

What do you imagine their reactions were when the steward asks about where they got this excellent wine? Wine! Now how did that happen!?

What do we learn about ministry in this moment? That when we- like the servants- do what Jesus tells us, even when it seems ridiculous, amazing and abundant things happen. Not always in a way people will see, or one which they will thank us for profusely. That sometimes when we offer our little bit, it's just water, they will receive it as the best wine they have tasted. It's just a thank you. It's just a card. But through our work, God makes it the best thing they have

tasted. God provides just what they need. God does provide them life abundant. And isn't that reward enough.

Is this sign about the wonders God does within the ordinariness of lives and through ordinary people? Where has abundance or grace appeared in your life in an unexpected way. Did you attend to that and consider that it has come from God? Or did you let it pass over you, like the bridegroom, and just go blithely on your way.

As we enter this new year, I would invite you all to consider the ways God enters into our lives and provides life fuller and more abundant than life would otherwise be. I would invite you to look for those places God provides this, and to believe in the one through whom all things came into being.

I would invite you to consider the ways in which follow the commands of Jesus to love God with all that we are and to love our neighbors as ourselves can be a means for God's abundance to enter into the world. That our little bit can be the best wine for someone. I would invite you to consider how your own gifts and talents, used in the service of God's kingdom, can be a means for that abundance to impact all those around us.

And now, let us sing together our hymn of the day as we prepare to go to our own banquet, of Christ's own body and blood, graciously given to us so that we might be fed to go forth into the world and be that means of abundance for others.