

Second Sunday after Epiphany

January 20, 2019

Sermon by Pastor Cindy Bullock

The Holy Gospel according to Saint John. (John 2: 1-11)

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

The Gospel of our Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

We are now in Epiphany, and Epiphany is about seeing. A couple weeks ago, I mentioned that we would be asking, over and over during the season of Epiphany, "What do you see?" So, when you look at this wedding, when you picture what's going on at this wedding taking place in the village of Cana, what do you see?

You might see abundance – like a hundred and eighty gallons of the very best wine. Nine hundred bottles dropped down unexpectedly on a party, even though they didn't know that the wine was running out. You might see God showing up in the middle of nowhere. Cana is not even on a map anymore. This is a peasant wedding, in the middle of nowhere. And that's where God shows up. God is with us – anywhere.

This weekend, as I was looking and thinking about this wedding at Cana, as I watched the story unfold in my mind, the thing that I see most clearly in this story is trust. This story shows what trust looks like. Let me explain.

"On the third day there was a wedding in the village of Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there." Imagine a wedding, imagine any wedding. I don't think they've changed all that much in essence since the first century: lots of relatives, a nervous couple, lots of food and drink. But the wine gave out. And the mother of Jesus takes him aside, off to a quiet place alone, and she says to him, *"They have no wine."*

You notice Mary doesn't say, "Oh, the wine's gone. I wonder if they have financial problems." No gossip. She didn't say, "The wine's gone. I can't believe they didn't plan better than that." No shame. She merely states what she sees. No commentary at all on the problem. *"There is no wine."* And her simple words say more than I think maybe even she knew.

Throughout the Old Testament, wine is not just wine. It is not just a drink made from grapes.

Listen to Amos 9:

*"The time will come," says the Lord,
"when the grain and grapes will grow faster
than it can be harvested.
Then the terraced vineyards on the hills of Israel
will drip with sweet wine!
I will bring my exiled people of Israel
back from distant lands,
and they will rebuild their ruined cities
and live in them again."*

Do you hear what wine is? If not, try Joel 3:

*"Then you will know that I, the Lord your God,
live in Zion, my holy mountain.
Jerusalem will be holy forever,
and foreign armies will never conquer her again.
In that day the mountains will drip with sweet wine."*

Or, one more. Isaiah 25:

*"On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wine,
of rich food filed with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.
And he will destroy on this mountain
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,
the sheet that is spread over all nations.
He will swallow up death forever."*

Wine is a sign of the coming of God. The someday when God will come and make all things right and just. The glorious day, often described as a feast, or a marriage feast, when God comes to bring life.

Mary comes to Jesus at that wedding in Cana and says, *"There is no wine."* Oh. There is no hope here. There is no future here. There is no God here. It becomes a devastating pronouncement.

Take a moment and reflect on your life, your community, your world. And imagine yourself pulling Jesus aside and saying, “There is no (blank)”, what would you say? “There is no rest?” “There is no clear path for me?” “There is no understanding in this world, no empathy?” “There is no hope in my life?” “There is no future I can see?” What is weighing on your heart? Look at Jesus and complete the thought. “There is no” – what?

Mary comes to Jesus and says, “*There is no wine.*” Now, Mary doesn’t come to Jesus and say, “There is no wine, so you’d better fix it!” She doesn’t say, “Fix this by running to the store,” and getting exactly this many bottles of wine, and get them back here at a certain time. She doesn’t say, “It’s time to start doing miracles. Let’s have it.” She simply says, “*There is no wine.*”

And that is what trust looks like. Speaking the truth about herself and her world, and trusting that God hears. Pouring out her heart and trusting that God will respond. Saying what is, and trusting that God will bring goodness to this. Trusting enough to be open to whatever God will do.

Mary trusts Jesus. But apparently Jesus is having none of it. “*Woman, what concern is it to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.*” My hour has not yet come. If wine has special meaning in the Old Testament, time has a special meaning in the Gospel of John.

Time. Listen to a couple of the verses from John.

Chapter 7: “*They tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him because his hour had not yet come.*”

Chapter 8: “*But no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.*”

Chapter 12: Jesus says: “*The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*”

And then he says: “*Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say: ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ No. It is for this reason that I have come to this hour.*”

And in Chapter 17, “*Jesus looked up to heaven and says, ‘Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so the Son may glorify you.’*”

The hour. The hour. All of time in the Gospel of John is pointing toward one thing. The cross. All of time is preparing for the hour when God will be revealed in all of God’s glorious love and sacrifice on the cross. At the wedding, Jesus says, “*My hour has not yet come.*” This, too, is what trust looks like. It is to be aware of God’s timing.

You and I, we live in the iGeneration. We are constantly tempted by what is quick, and easy, and cheap. We want it now. We want it fast. We want it simple. We want it with no cost. But what God wants is seldom fast, or easy, or cheap. A life of faith takes time, takes practice, takes experience.

We learn relationship through time, and forgiveness, and being together. We learn wisdom through time and failing. We learn to trust God over time, until the right time when God comes and God responds. And then we look back and we think: "Oh, I see what God was doing. God was getting ready for this."

This is what trust looks like. Mary says, "*There is no wine,*" without knowing what Jesus will do or when Jesus will do it. But she does trust enough to give that vague instruction to the servants. Right? "Do whatever he tells you."

And then I think what happens next is the most difficult portrait of trust that we find in this Gospel. It's difficult, because it involves actually doing something. Listening to God and doing something.

The servants are told to fill the purity vessels. A hundred and eighty gallons. This is up to fifteen hundred pounds of water, carried from the well or from the river. There is no indoor plumbing. There are no hoses. This is real physical labor and time that's involved in filling these vessels. Labor that seems completely unrelated to the crisis at hand. "*There's no wine.*" And Jesus says, "Go get wash water."

Imagine what might be going through those servants' minds as they haul one hundred and eighty gallons of water into the house. Imagine what one servant is thinking as she takes a cup of water to the chief steward. It makes no sense. She has no recourse if it doesn't work. She is putting it out there. She is doing what she's told. And her future is in the hands of this man called Jesus.

This is what trust looks like. It's risky. It involves work without guarantees. It depends on the promise, the promise that somehow God is leading us to a new and better world. God is moving us forward. We depend on the example of Jesus, the commandments of God, and the promise that working in God's way will make a difference. We depend on the promise that God will bring wholeness and healing to the world. This is what trust looks like. This is what following Jesus looks like.

And, in the end, there is abundance. In the end, there is joy. In the end, there is God in an obscure village working a miracle. In the end, there will always be abundance and joy and the presence of God working miracles. But it starts with simply trusting. And we can see at this wedding what trust looks like.

Amen.