

2 Epiphany                      John 2:1-11  
Christ and Grace                January 20, 2019  
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If you have ever planned a wedding, you have a pretty good idea of what probably happened at the wedding in Cana. People forgot to RSVP and they attended anyway, and so there was not enough wine. They simply ran out. That's easy enough to explain. What's not so easy to explain is how Jesus turned the water in 6 stone jars into the finest wine. About 180 gallons of fine wine. Fortunately the bride and groom had included Jesus and his mother on the guest list, and contrary to all the wedding mishap stories that we hear, this one has a glorious ending.

This is a story about how God works; it's a story about the very nature of God. God who is so very generous and lavish. God who provides not just enough but more than enough. God who cares about every aspect of our lives, even the joyous events of our lives. God who provides more than we can ask or imagine, even when it seems like there is not enough, even when there appears to be no way through a crisis.

The bride and groom in this story, along with their parents, had planned a perfect wedding. It was a beautiful celebration with family and friends. In the ancient world, wedding feasts lasted for days, and it was the host's responsibility to provide abundant food and drink for the duration of the festivities. To run out of wine early would be a dishonor and a disgrace — a breach of hospitality that the guests would remember for years. In this culture of honor and shame, to run out of food or wine was the ultimate embarrassment. Despite their best plans, the unimaginable happened - there was no more wine.

We make plans all the time, good and beautiful plans, and sometimes things do not go as we expect. It doesn't matter what the particulars look like — chronic illness, deep personal loss, financial trouble, and systemic injustice. We will find ourselves, like Mary, saying, "They have no wine" when events occur that seem tragic and unacceptable, embarrassing, or challenging to the customs and social mores of our own time. But even if things don't go as we planned (or forgot to plan, or didn't even see coming) Jesus is always in attendance, always there to turn water into wine, to work all things for good, to make everything new.

This happens at church too. How often do we in the church react just as Mary did – we have no wine – we don't have enough people in the pews, the pledges won't balance our budget, the windows need restoration, and the payment for the roof repair work may require a capital campaign. We are out of wine! How often do we just stop right there, stuck in the worry and anxiety of scarcity?

Mary did not stop there. Mary went to Jesus. Mary knew something about miracles. She had already witnessed a few of her own and she trusted in God as a result of her own experiences.

Mary also knew that God needed some physical hands and feet on the ground to accomplish the miracle of providing exactly what was needed. So she enlisted the help of the servants. The staff. The wedding caterers. Call them what you will in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – they were those she knew had the gifts, skills, and desire to make the miracle happen.

And so it was the servants who saw this wondrous miracle of abundance play out right before their eyes. It was the servants who saw it all --- those who most likely never even got a sip of all that fine wine that was now refilling the glasses of the guests. Indeed, like so many we know today, they were those who go mostly unseen, unnoticed by the rest of us as they go about doing the work they are called to do. They are the ones who first glimpsed the promise of Jesus. They are the ones who responded when help was needed, the ones willing to be the hands and feet of the miracle at Cana.

And it was Mary who knew that her son, God's Son, could turn water into wine, could create joy and abundance out of scarcity, and who finally would give his life blood to save us all. It was Mary who did not choose to sit in the worry and anxiety of scarcity, but who asked Jesus to reveal the nature of God to everyone at the feast – the family, the guests, the servants, and the disciples. And as we ponder this story, the nature of God is revealed to us.

We need not despair when it might seem as if there is not enough. When we are looking for a miracle, for a sign, we look to Jesus who brings love and transformation exactly when we need it and in overflowing abundance. At times the miracle comes in a different form than we expect and often that means change. How might God be inviting us to participate in a miracle in the life of someone else, or in the life of this church?

When a miracle presents itself, will we allow ourselves to see it? To be changed by it? How are we being called to join in the work of revealing the nature of God?

As water is turned into wine, we witness the transformative and redemptive power of Christ, as he turns the ordinary into the extraordinary, disaster into celebration. If Jesus can turn water into wine at a wedding in Cana, is there any situation, any human condition that he is not capable of redeeming? This is how God works when we, like Mary choose to respond to the generous and extravagant grace of God.

Amen.