

More Wine!

Meditation on John 2:1-11

January 17, 2016

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

“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.”

Why is it that sometimes it takes congregations to suffer a tragic loss before they rediscover their faith in Jesus Christ? And why is it that some congregations, after tragic loss or bitter conflict, give up, break down, break apart and die--while others, such as a century-old church in Allentown, Pennsylvania, rise up to become better and stronger--more united, joyful, and hopeful -- than ever before?

Hilltop United Methodist Church lost their building to fire in August 2014. The congregation wasn't large or wealthy. They had to raise more than a million dollars, find another place to worship for a year, and hold themselves together as a congregation, while the church was being rebuilt. It was a traditional congregation like many other churches in America these days, with more people 55 and up than 35 and down. But they didn't just rebuild what they had before. They built something new to meet the needs and desires of the future, while honoring the beauty and meaningful ritual and symbols of the past. The new sanctuary has stained glass windows and pews; and they sing hymns accompanied by

piano and a modern, electronic projection system. Everyone had something to contribute to the “rebuilding” project, including a young boy whom Pastor Sue Hutchins recognized on Nov. 23-- their first service back in their rebuilt, updated sanctuary. Logan Wilson had raised \$750 by growing and selling his pumpkins. Did you see his proud smile?

Pastor Sue, speaking of the terrible loss and their miraculous recovery, said, “We were committed to this community and knew that God had a plan and a purpose for us here... It doesn’t matter if there is a fire. It doesn’t matter if there is some kind of catastrophe. God is still here... I just knew that God would bring us through.”

Don’t miss this important point: the church, when they gathered for their first service back in their building, was not celebrating the success of a fundraising campaign or the building project! They were celebrating, truly, their “new life” together in Jesus Christ.

In our gospel today, we find Mary, Jesus, and the disciples at a wedding in the little village of Cana, about 9 miles north of Nazareth in the Galilean hill country. Weddings back then were communal celebrations. The wedding of a virgin was held in the bridegroom’s house on a Wednesday. Relatives and friends came from all over to witness the covenant of man and wife, the union of two families. A wedding supper would start the festivities, which would last an entire week! Note that Mary, Jesus and the disciples aren’t wedding crashers. They aren’t strangers; they are invited, as we discover in the second verse, though we don’t know the name of the couple or their relationship to Mary or Jesus.

Don’t be fooled by this cozy, seemingly ordinary village scene. Jesus and his disciples aren’t taking a vacation from ministry. This is where the glory of God in Jesus Christ will be revealed for the very first time in the book of John--and his disciples, including Mary, will come to believe.

Wine wasn’t a usual drink for common people back then. Many peasants were employed in the grape-growing and winemaking

industry, but poor people could not afford wine. However, it was expected that there would not be a wedding without wine--and plenty of it-- to last 7 days and nights! Families would sell their flocks and borrow from other family members, if need be, to have wine at their children's weddings. A wedding without wine would be an unthinkable embarrassment for the community.

And then the wine "gives out" or "runs short" or "fails," as some translations say. This is a crisis! Mary turns to Jesus and says, "They have no wine," but what she really means is, "What are we going to do?!" Jesus's answer is cryptic. He addresses his mother as, "Woman," but this is not to be misinterpreted as rudeness. Throughout John's gospel, Jesus always calls Mary, "Woman." In fact, Jesus, throughout the NT, never calls his mother by her first name or the Greek equivalent of "Mom"--not even when Jesus is on the cross. We read in John 19:26-27, "Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, (and) he said to her, "Woman, here is your son. Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." From that hour, the disciple took her into his home."

John's gospel is full of signs and symbols, words and phrases with more than one meaning and allusions to other scripture. The use of the word "woman" for Mary takes us back to Genesis, when God created man and "woman" in his image from the dust of the earth, but already had the redemption of humanity planned out! John sees Mary as the new Eve, just as the apostle Paul calls Jesus the "new man," the second and the last Adam. He says in 1 Cor. 15:45, "Thus it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being'; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit."

Back to the wedding crisis, in John 2:4, Jesus says to Mary, "What has this concern of yours to do with me?" Literally, he says, "What to me and to you?" This is an old Hebrew expression that can mean two things. One, it could be said by the injured person believing the other person is unjustly bothering or injuring him: "What have I done to you that you should do this to me?" such as when the poor widow says to Elijah in 1 Kings 17:18, "What have you against me, O man of God? You have come to me to bring my sin to remembrance, and to cause the death of my son!" Or it can mean, as I believe is the case here, "This is your business,

how am I involved?” such as when Elisha says to the King of Israel in II Kings 3:13: “What have I to do with you? Go to your father’s prophets or to your mother’s.” The second implies disagreement, not hostility or injury.

The reason Jesus supplies for his disagreement? “My *hour* has not come.” The ancient translation of this, however, could actually mean, “Has my hour *not yet* come?” The use of the expression implies the opening or revealing of Christ’s ministry--not the passion, death and resurrection that the expression will come to mean in John 12:23-24, when Jesus answers his disciples, saying, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

Now, what does it mean when Mary turns to the servants and tells them to do whatever Jesus tells them? Does she expect a miracle? Is she telling Jesus what to do, and ignoring his response? Or is she just expressing her faith that Jesus will intervene in some way so that the joy of the celebration would not be stolen away and the wedding of a friend or family member ruined? Her faith is all the more impressive considering this is the FIRST miracle Jesus has done so far. Whether it is Mary’s faith or simply God’s plan all along or both, the wine is replenished and better than before. In fact, they have more wine than they probably need--more than 120 gallons!

What captures my attention is the old wine versus the new--and how the new wine comes from water set apart for Jewish purification rites, symbolizing the “old religion” of the law failing, falling short, running dry. When the headwaiter, having no idea what has happened, tastes the “new wine,” he calls the bridegroom and says, “Everyone serves the choice wine first; then, when the guests have been drinking awhile, the inferior wine. But you have kept the choice wine until now.”

Don’t you wonder why the guests don’t notice how inferior the wine is--until the “new” wine is produced? Why WAS the inferior wine OK? And then it came to me. Because that was the wine they were used to drinking. They didn’t know the joy they were missing!

Maybe it's scary for some of us when we ask the Lord to remake us a church and individuals into something new-- something more hopeful, faithful, loving, and joyful. Maybe it's scary because it will mean humbly embracing change and new ideas and letting go of old, negative thoughts and behaviors. It will mean having to admit that we have been drinking inferior wine--or that we have allowed the wine to completely run out, without seeking the Lord to refresh, renew, and refill us!

And only then, when we seek the Lord for not just MORE, but NEW wine and accept the NEW that God wants us to *do* and *be*, will we be able to celebrate, like the little church in Allentown that rose up from the ashes, our *new life* in Jesus Christ.

Let us pray.

Loving, patient Lord,

Thank you for being with us, through all the struggles our church has faced in its more than 50 year history. Thank you, also, for your many blessings to us and the joy that we have experienced as we have sought to be your light to those who stumble in darkness. Fill us, Lord, with your new wine. Make us to do and be something we have never been-- better than ever before. Humble us by the knowledge of your love. Lead us to be confident of our new life in Jesus Christ, which begins from this day, from this very moment on. Forgive us for negative thoughts and whispered words that have held us back from the changes you want us to make, changes we may have resisted for fear that it isn't what we have done before. Give us courage to take risks --to dwell boldly together as your people, speaking the truth in love to one another, having grace for one another, being kind to one another, encouraging one another to use all the resources and gifts you have given us to build up your righteous kingdom. Help us to make our life of worship together truly a loving celebration, a miraculous sign for all the world of your power, hope, and glory, like the wedding of Cana long ago. In Christ we pray. Amen.