

Sermon for Epiphany II Year C 2019  
*When the Wine Gives Out*

Some would say weddings are accidents waiting to happen.  
Something almost always goes wrong . . . at the service or the reception.  
So, it's no surprise, really, that something is going wrong  
at the wedding in Cana of Galilee.  
“They have no wine.”

With those words Mary speaks a truth not just about that wedding,  
but about our lives.  
A truth that at some point we all experience.  
There comes a day when the wine gives out.  
The glass is empty.  
The party is over.  
On that day life seems empty and dry.  
There is no vibrancy or vitality.  
Nothing is growing or fermenting within us.  
Our world is colorless and tasteless.  
The bouquet of life is absent and we are living less than fully alive.

Mary's words hold before us some serious questions and wonderings.  
Where has the wine of our life given out?  
What relationships have run dry?  
What parts of us remain empty?  
These are questions we can ask of ourselves individually,  
but also as a community of faith.

Each one of us could tell a story about the day the wine gave out.  
It might be about the death of a loved one or the loss of a friendship.  
Some of us might speak about our search for love and acceptance.  
Some will describe their thirst for meaning and significance.  
Others will tell of their guilt, disappointments, or regrets.  
Many of the stories will be about fear of what is or what might be.

Stories of failure and self-doubt abound.  
Some will describe a longing and desire  
for something they cannot name or describe.  
The storyline of unanswered prayer, doubts, or questions  
is known by most of us.  
And, they are not all stories from the past.  
Some of us are living those stories today.

Behind each of our stories is the hope and desire  
for a wedding of our life.  
We come to the wedding at Cana not simply as guests and spectators,  
but as participants, as a bride or groom,  
seeking union, intimacy, and wholeness.

Despite our best efforts, good intentions and hard work, however,  
it seems that the wine of our life is always giving out.  
No matter how often we refill it our glass remains empty.  
There is never enough wine.  
As the day wears on we become increasingly aware that  
we cannot replenish the wine from our own resources.

That day seems like a disaster, an embarrassment, a failure.  
That must have been what it was like for the bride and groom  
at their wedding in Cana.  
*They have no wine*, Mary tells Jesus.  
That is not a condemnation or judgment  
but simply an observation, a diagnosis.

This is not about the wine but about the people.  
It is a statement about the human condition.  
It is about you and me as much as it is  
about that wedding in Cana so long ago.  
It is, pardon the pun—a spiritual condition.  
It is about our inner life, our way of being,  
more than the circumstances of our life outside of ourselves.

Too often we live the illusion of our self-sufficiency.  
That illusion is shattered on the day the wine runs out  
and the jars of our life stand empty and dry.  
That day confronts us with a new truth as old as creation itself.  
We are the recipients and not the creators of our life.  
We were never intended nor expected  
to live by the sufficiency of our own resources.  
Christ is not only the true vine but the true vintner  
and chief steward of our lives.

Regardless of how it feels or what we think about it,  
the day the wine runs out is the beginning of a miracle.  
Christ does not simply refill our glasses.  
He transforms our lives,  
with an act of new creation—turning water into wine.  
Did you notice how the story begins?  
It is the third day—the day of resurrection and new life.  
That which was colorless is now vibrant red.  
That which had no taste now is now brimming with flavor.  
That which had no fragrance now has a full bouquet.  
That which was still is now fermenting, active, and alive.

On the third day our lives are filled to the brim with the good wine;  
intoxicating us with the life of God,  
inebriating us with the blood of Christ,  
and leaving us under the influence of the Holy Spirit.  
That's the miracle of Cana and it has never ceased happening.  
Every moment of every day,  
Christ pours himself into the empty jars of our life.  
He is the good wine;  
extravagant, abundant, endless.

Every time that good wine is poured,  
our lives are changed and transformed.  
We are brought out of falsehood into truth, out of sin into righteousness,  
out of death into life.  
I can't tell you how that happens.  
I only know that it does happen.  
I have tasted the good wine.  
I have experienced the miracle at Cana in my life  
and seen it in the lives of others.

I have experienced moments when death is turned into life,  
sorrow into joy, and despair into hope.  
I have seen that happen in the lives of others.  
I have been surprised by fear that was transformed into courage  
and seen people do things they never thought possible.  
I have watched empty lives be filled back up.  
I know of broken lives that have become vibrant and life-giving.

This is the miracle of Cana.  
The moments when Christ is revealed in acts of new creation—  
when goodness is greater than evil, love stronger than hate,  
and victory is ours through Christ who loves us.  
Then our lives shine with the radiance of his glory  
because his glory—his radiance—becomes ours.

*On the third day there was a wedding in Cana  
and the wine gave out.  
They have no wine, Mary said.  
But they will.  
The miracle always begins when the wine gives out.  
Christ provides the good wine now.  
Because this isn't a miracle about scarcity,  
like the multiplying of the loaves,  
this is a miracle of plenty and abundance.*

So what do we do when the wine gives out.  
What can our place be in a miracle of plenty?

Perhaps we can be like Mary.  
We can take notice of the need—whether it is ours or others.  
We can name the need—before God and others.  
And then we trust.

No matter how profound the scarcity,  
no matter how impossible the situation,  
we can elbow our way in—  
pull Jesus aside, ask earnestly for help,  
and ready ourselves for action.  
We can tell God hard truths,  
even when we're supposed to be celebrating.  
We can help human need squarely before our eyes,  
even when denial, apathy, or distraction are easier options.  
And finally, we can invite others to obey the miraculous  
wine-maker we have come to know and trust.

Mary tells Jesus, *They have no wine.*  
Then she tells those who serve,  
*Do whatever he tells you.*  
We live in the tension between these two sentences.  
May we live there well,  
confident of the one whose help we seek.  
Because Christ is good.  
Christ is generous.  
And he is love . . . abundant love.  
When the wine runs out,  
the miracle of abundance begins.