

2nd Sunday after the Epiphany (Year B)

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*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.*

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The wedding had gone off without a hitch - so far. The bridal party all had shown up on time (for the most part). The photographer was polite and efficient. Nobody messed up the liturgy. 1 Corinthians 13 was read with all its cliché glory. The right rings made it to the right hands (or, the *left* hands, to be more precise), the marriage certificate had been signed on the dotted line by the preacher, the organist played Vidor's Toccata perfectly. Everyone had made it to the reception venue where the DJ had dance tunes waiting for them, dinner had been served, the crab cakes weren't too crabby and the wedding cake wasn't too gawdy. Everything was looking fine. The bride and groom's families, it appeared, had dotted all of their "I's" and crossed all of their "T's."

All of the usual pre-wedding drama had run its course and the families of the bride and groom had finally allowed themselves the pleasure of simply sitting back and enjoying the fellowship of beloved company.

But then, the unthinkable happened! The wine ran out! All of the good wine had been served and their reserves of "2-buck chuck" had been exhausted. A nervous hush spread across the room and whispers started to remark upon the incredible lack of hospitality that such a travesty represented. How could they not have enough wine? Had they forgotten to make that final CostCo run? Could they not afford the appropriate amount?

Over in the corner, a mother turned to her son and said the obvious, "psssst, the wine has run out." He whispered something bluntly in her ear and she turned to the servers and said, "do whatever he tells you." The bearded man waved to some nearby water jars, each carrying about 20 or 30 gallons of water. The chief server rolled his eyes and reluctantly strolled over to the containers. *What was that man expecting to happen, the waiter thought, that this massive amount of water was going to turn into the finest Italian wine? That'd be day, he laughed to himself.* He dipped a cup into the water and pinched himself because he could have sworn the liquid turned a red color as soon as it touched the chalice. Not knowing what to think, he brought the cup to his lips and drank the beverage. It splashed over his tongue and he swirled it around in his mouth. Suddenly, he froze. *Son of a gun, he thought, that bearded man clearly*

*knew something he did not.* The waiter didn't know how he had done it but this regular joe - or so he looked - had turned the water into wine. And this was not just any wine. And he should know - wine was his livelihood. He had served wine at hundreds of weddings and this was certainly not his first rodeo! He knew the difference between cheap wine and fine wine and this, *this was fine* wine!

He laughed to himself and waved for the other waiters to come and begin refilling people's cups. One by one, the judgmental whispers changed into whispers of disbelief, for joy was beginning to bubble up where before there had only been awkward silence.

Little did they know that this was the first of many signs that would be demonstrated by this bearded man sitting nonchalantly in the corner of the reception hall.

You see, this man (whom some have started to call "Messiah" and "Teacher") will go on to do many things. He will heal people who come to him in desperation. He will challenge pharisees that come to him in malice. He will speak and fellowship with those whom society deems unworthy and unloveable. He will do many things and this is the first of them.

You see, this man who just did a tremendously curious thing came from tremendously curious circumstances. The son of a young woman and a young man from the line of David, this magical man was born, they say, in a manger because there was no place for them in the inn. And as if that weren't curious enough, shepherds and wisemen came to visit him, they say, to bring him praise and honor. This is no ordinary story! And if we needed any more proof of this truth then we have received it today in that hectic and joyful wedding reception.

Still wet, perhaps, from his baptism in the Jordan River, this bearded man joins this wedding reception to have some fun with friends and family. Though he could very easily be the center of attention, he does not seek it. Instead, he sits nonchalantly in the corner, as if someone who did not wish to flaunt his presence. It has been a week since he was dunked by his cousin John in the river. However, he has not been idle. In between his baptism and this miraculous rapid-fermentation, Jesus has called disciples to follow him.

First he found two disciples who *had* been following John the Baptist but then left John (with his blessing, of course) to follow Jesus. The three of them (Andrew, Simon Peter, and Jesus, that is), go on the next day and pick up Philip and Nathanael. The five of them, we can presume, are the ones that attend this party.

I wonder what Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, and Nathanael thought upon witnessing this miracle. So far, their dialogue with Jesus (at least that which is recorded in the Gospel) is pretty scarce. So far, Jesus has communicated far more through actions than he has words. He has not spoken about baptism; he has been baptized. He has not discussed abundance; he has created it.

And what he has created is so far from what you and I would expect. You and I would expect that the water would remain water. That is, in my experience at least, what water does unless it is drunk or evaporated or soaked into a sponge. And yet (and thanks be to God) Jesus does not put much stock in my or our expectations; it is his job to shatter them. Therefore, Jesus turns the water into wine and *then* takes the miraculousness a step further! Jesus creates abundance in quantity *and* quality! This tremendously curious bearded man in the far corner of a wedding reception turns regular, ordinary, common water into delicious, extraordinary, uncommon wine!

This was done to “reveal his glory,” or so we are told in John’s gospel. This was done that we might have a clue as to what this man has come to do and be in this world. So what does this miracle reveal? Well, like all miracles, *you* are the best person to answer *that* particular question. However, I will humbly propose two “revelations” that come to us this day as we confront this story.

The first is this: this story begins the stories of Jesus in John’s gospel because it teaches us to expect the unexpected. Let’s face it, if the gospel was merely a collection of stories of Jesus meeting our expectations, then John’s gospel (and all gospels for that matter) would be a collection of boring stories that in no way revealed the glory of God’s creation! Today’s passage asks us the following question: what if we began listening to every story we have of this Jesus fellow by putting aside our expectations and preparing ourselves for the unexpected? How would that change the way we hear the Gospel truth? I would think you and I would discover many new things. And isn’t that the point of our time together? Isn’t that the point of worship?

Another revelation of God’s glory in today’s passage is this: there are times in every person’s life when the party comes to a crashing halt. There are times in every person’s life when the wine runs out and joyfulness is replaced by painful, heavy silence. In those moments, may we all be reminded that the best wine is yet to come. In those moments, may we all be encouraged that the Gospel truth bears abundance to us and calls us to bear abundance to one another.

An interesting aspect of today’s story is that although Jesus created the abundant supply of wine, it was *not* his role to distribute it. In this story, you and I are not playing the role of Jesus, creating wine from water. Perhaps you and I are playing the role of the servants whose job it is to distribute and share that which Jesus places so generously before us.

Friends, the best wine is yet to come. In this season of Epiphany, new and exciting revelations of God’s glory await us around every corner. In today’s story, a non-assuming man in his own corner brings joyfulness to all in the room, joyfulness that, I daresay, was received when it was least expected.

Friends, the best wine is coming and it is coming in abundant supply. Come, for the party is just beginning...

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.