

“I tried making wine once”

- Jesus makes it look so easy!
 - I actually made several batches back in the day
 - I bought the glass jug, collected the empty bottles that I would fill later
 - I learned that you have to sanitize and sanitize to make sure the wine does not get any bacteria in it while fermenting
 - I learned you can use wood chips to give it that oaky flavor
 - I was so excited!
 - So I bought the wine making kit, mixed the juice, sugar, wood chips yeast- everything needed and put it in the jar
 - I put a heater in the room with it to get the temperature at 75 degrees so the yeast could do its work
 - You put this special cork in the top with an air bubble in it, so air can get out but not get in
 - And then you wait.
 - Then you pump out the wine and leave behind the sediment
 - I’m making this really simple, but back then I was following the instructions diligently
 - But no... we poured that first batch down the drain!
 - It tasted like clay. Thick, gritty, clay in a glass.
 - I kept trying, but I never made wine better than the \$3/bottle wine we could buy at the store.
 - It seems that wine making is not my gift from the Holy Spirit.
 - These days, I stick to buying wine, and I joined one of those wine clubs over the COVID shutdown in 2020
 - Instead of making it, I am aging it. That seems a lot safer and easier
- As we enter this season of Epiphany, we start to learn about Jesus as he begins his life’s work, his ministry
 - John’s Gospel records the first miracle here, and it serves as an introduction to this season after Epiphany
 - We do not have a lot of information about Jesus’s young life, with only two of the Gospels even talking about his birth
 - So we move directly from birth and wise men, to Baptism and first miracle at the age of 30ish

- Now it's time for us to get to know who Jesus has grown up to be
- And this season is appropriately named, for the goal is for us, year after year, to have our own epiphanies about this man named Jesus
- This story of course is a favorite for many of us- the author of John tells it so perfectly and humorously
- Jesus, a fully grown man, accompanies his mother to a wedding, followed by his disciples who serve as witnesses to the event
- Imagining them all walking in together... It could be the opening scene in a SITCOM
- Now if Jesus is 30, Mary might be upper 40s, and I even imagine she might be a grandmother for other children
- As time has passed, scholars usually conclude that Joseph has died by this point in Jesus' life,
- Perhaps that explains why he is there with Mary- he was her plus one
- Others suggest that this is an extended family member's wedding, which would place Mary and Jesus as honored guests
 - Who would share in the honor or dishonor that might come from this event- we will get to that in a minute
- Mary is the star here, although she is only referred to as the Mother of Jesus, this and the crucifixion are the only times she appears in John¹
- She learns that the wine has run out at this wedding- for you and me, that would just simply signal the end of the party, right?
- Not so in this culture of honor and shame, this would have been devastating to the family and their standing in the village²
- If Mary and Jesus were related, it would even spill over onto them some
- Maybe this motivated Mary to talk with Jesus, or perhaps she was simply having a good time and did not want to go home yet
- She leans over to Jesus and simply says, "They have no wine." ...
- There's a lot in that little sentence.
- Mary, after 30 years, has to know something, has to know a lot, about her son who whose birth was heralded by angels
- In my mind, and this certainly says more about me than about Mary, but I see her giving him the look.
- You know- the, "do something" look of expectation, the knowing mom glance
- Full of love, sure, and also full of "do what you're supposed to"

¹ Davis Hankins, *Feasting on the Gospels*, John 2:1-12 Exegetical Perspective, digital version

² Interpretation Bible Commentary

- Maybe it is a kick in the pants for Jesus to start his ministry.
- I see it even more when, after Jesus hesitates citing that his “hour has not yet come” and that doing anything would be premature,
- She does not even respond. She just turns to the staff and so that they are prepared, tells them to do what he says.
- And the space between these sentences huge.
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- Then the resolution happens and Jesus has the staff fill the stone jars with wine
- And of course, the water turns into wine, and not the \$3/bottle kind, but the good stuff!
- The family is saved from embarrassment, the party continues, and the disciples believe even more in this teacher that they are following
- There is a lot pack into these short 11 verses
 - Turns out, 6 stone jars of wine is about 605 bottles! ³
 - John’s gospel spends more time telling us about the quantity of wine than he does just about anything else
 - I think there is a lot of meaning in this part
 - For starters, the abundance of wine-and in this case so much wine they would surely not drink it all-⁴
 - is a symbol from Amos and Joel, and signals the joyous arrival of God’s new age
 - Also, the miraculous supply of wine in Greek folklore is a common motif signaling the presence of a god
 - I doubt John was going for that, but if you think of who might be reading John’s gospel, perhaps it was a subtle clue to the Greeks
 - But it is the transformation of the water itself that forms the focus of this miracle and its meaning as Jesus’s inaugural miracle
 - It is a signal that a new age is coming in Jesus⁵
 - And these jars, they were used for the Jewish ritual of purification, or washing of hands
 - Changing their purpose from purifying what is ritualistically unclean to being the vessels that keep the party going is a huge shift
 - And indeed, plain water that once reminded everyone of their unclean status, now is rich wine

³ Gary Neal Hansen, *Feasting on the Gospels*, John 2:1-12 Theological Perspective, Digital version

⁴ New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary

⁵ Interpretation Bible Commentary

- Throughout Jesus' ministry, he continues to proclaim just how close God really is,
- And that we are no longer separated from God in ways like being ritualistically unclean-
- God loves us as we are, offering forgiveness and a new start, a transformation that might mirror plain water into rich, great wine
- All of this because Mary encourages Jesus to share his gift generously, and through it so much began to change and transform
- Hold on to that thought- that sharing gifts leads to transformation
 - It is no accident that also today is the reading from Paul, where he talks about the gifts of the Spirit
 - I'll be the first to tell you that some on this list make me a little uneasy, like miracle working, prophecy, tongues, etc
 - I don't know how that works out in most cases
 - I certainly prefer the discernment, wisdom, and healing
 - But if we get caught up there, we have missed the point
 - It is not the specific gifts here that I want to look at, but the overwhelming abundance of gifts that God gives through the Spirit
 - It is not unlike the abundance of wine before, and the abundance of loaves and fish that come next
 - It points to God's on extravagance when it comes to God's love for this world and God's children in it
 - And those gifts given are so often underutilized
 - But God gives us these gifts to benefit the whole party, the whole community⁶
 - And I think it is through using these gifts, giving of ourselves and what we have been given, that we are transformed
 - And that our church and our world is transformed.
 - That God's love and God's justice get poured out like fine wine
- This season of Epiphany, or maybe the season of epiphanies, is an opportunity for change, and I mean the inside out type of change
 - The more we learn about Jesus, the more we come to believe and trust that God is doing something amazing that started here
 - The more that we feel called to be a part of it
 - Because it is where the celebration is, it is where the hope is
 - Like those jars, we can go from being plain water on the inside, to overflowing with the best from God's vineyard

⁶ PulpitFiction, Year C Epiphany 2, Retrieved January 14, 2022, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/pulpit-fiction-podcast/id601880520?i=1000547298220>

- It is when we begin to see what all God has done for us, the gifts and blessings we have been given
- And we can see that it is by giving them back to the community, to the church, to the world, that we and others are transformed
- God's kingdom is waiting on nothing else but us.
- In this weekend in particular, when our nation pauses to celebrate Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
 - His gifts were great, and he gave them without reservation fully up to and including his own life
 - For the work of racial justice
 - The work for that justice, and all forms of equality, still has much to do
 - There is much work to be done to help those in need, near and far, and to create a world in which need is reduced
 - And there are people right here who need a faith community and need us to gather
 - The world needs something deeper than social media, something older than a couple of hundred years to believe in.
 - What gift or gifts has God given you, and how can you use them in a way that transforms others?
 - Because when we do, we are refilled by that Holy Spirit like those jars, and we overflow with the grace and joy that can only be compared to great wine
 - Perhaps today, we leave with just the image of Mary, the mother of Jesus
 - We have read and talked a lot about her in the last two months as she was visited by an angel,
 - Gave birth to the Son of God while traveling, and in stressful accommodations
 - She gave her gift, her very being, her body, to bring God made flesh into the world
 - And she looks right at you and me with that loving, knowing mother look, full of wisdom and also the "you need to do what I say" twinkle in her eye
 - And she says, "The world is ready for you, and it needs your gifts- they will love it more than fine wine that never runs out
 - And without waiting for our response, and with that look, she says: "I'll tell them you're coming."

Amen.