

Sermon 1.17.16

Pastor Josh Ferris

Second Sunday after Epiphany, Year C

Psalms 36:5-10 | 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 | **John 2:1-11**

This wedding in today's reading is every bride's nightmare. I remember planning our wedding, with all the details and things to do. The catering. The venue. The DJ. The guest list. The seating chart. The best advice we got was from our pastor. He said, "Something *is* going to go wrong. Just be okay with that. Because at the end of the day, you're still going to be married, and that's what matters." Words of wisdom for sure.

Weddings like the one Jesus attended in Cana were different than the ones we know today. Back then the bride and groom didn't celebrate their marriage with a honeymoon trip. Instead, they had a party with their friends and family for *seven days*. Seven days of eating and drinking and dancing and celebrating. Imagine having to plan a *seven day party*, having to make sure that there was enough for everyone for an entire week.

At this wedding, the unimaginable happened: the wine ran out. We don't know if the party had just started or if people were headed home tomorrow, but it was a *big deal*. It would ruin the part, and even more than that, it was socially humiliating. It was *embarrassing* to run out of wine with everyone there. It would end up being the thing that everyone remembered.

And for whatever reason, Mary felt like she had to do something when she noticed what was going on. Maybe she was close to the people getting married, or maybe she was really enjoying the party and wanted to keep it going. Maybe the mother of our Lord was an empathetic woman, and she wanted to do whatever she could to keep the family from being embarrassed. Whatever the reason, Mary saw a need and decided to do something.

And what did she do? She told Jesus about it.

She must have already had an idea of who Jesus was and what he could do. Maybe that funny picture I've seen on the internet of the baby Jesus refusing to get into the bathtub by walking on water has some truth to it, because Mary believed Jesus has the power to do something about the wine running out.

Jesus *can* do something. There are some big jars nearby and Jesus orders the servants to fill them up with water, and you know what happens next – he turns the water into wine. And we're not talking about a little bit of wine. We're talking about 150 *gallons* of wine, enough for 3,840 *cups* of wine, enough to make 480 people blow *twice* the legal limit. When Jesus provides for people, he doesn't do it halfway, he does it abundantly. Whether it's loaves, fishes, or wine, with Jesus, there is always more than enough for everyone.

It's significant that Jesus performed a miracle to keep a party going. It says a lot about life and faith and God. Our religion isn't supposed to be somber and joyless. It's not just okay, it's *good* to have fun in life. Perhaps this morning's miracle can be a good reminder that we're not supposed to be too holy to be happy, and our church can and *should* be a place to have some fun and experience joy together in life.

But what's really weird is that Jesus seemed hesitant to perform this miracle. In the book of John, miracles are referred to as "signs." Our reading says this is the *first* sign that Jesus performed, and that as a result "his disciples believed in him." (v. 11) Jesus knows that *seeing is believing*, and he performs signs and miracles so that people will *believe* in him. At the very end of John, it says, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written *so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the*

Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life.” (John 20:30-31) That’s the point of all the signs Jesus performs – so that people will see them and believe in him.

That’s why it’s strange that Jesus is dragging his feet at the wedding. He’s all about performing signs, so we’d expect him to be excited about this opportunity. He has a captive audience, ready and waiting.

Instead when his mother tells him about the wine, he says, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” (v. 4) He’s basically saying, “Mom, why are you telling me? That’s not my problem.” Jesus had come to the wedding to be with his friends and to celebrate, *not* to perform signs and miracles! He just wanted to eat and drink and relax and be merry. He was off the clock.

I’ve felt like that sometimes. Sometimes I intentionally don’t tell people I’m a pastor, because I don’t have time or energy to deal with the conversation that will inevitably follow. There are times when I just want to go to the grocery store and shop, and not be recognized as a pastor by someone who needs to talk. A few months ago I finished a visit at Lankenau and just wanted to go *home* when a young woman in the parking lot knocked on my window and asked for a ride. I was wearing my clergy collar at the time, so how could I say no, even though the drive into north Philly was nowhere near home?

We all have times like that. Times when you don’t want to have to be a parent just right now. Times when you just want to go out to dinner in the city and not have to deal with the homeless individual who’s asking for aid. Times when you’re busy or exhausted or just want to ignore the human need that’s right in front of you. Times when, like Jesus, you just want to enjoy what we’re doing and not have to be *on*.

For Jesus, this was an interruption. A surprise. It was *not* how he wanted his day to go. And in that moment he had two choices – he could be resentful about it, or he could see it as an opportunity for God to use.

So often in life things don't go according to our expectations. Conversations don't go the way we hope. Doctors bring unexpected news. We sit in traffic. We don't get into the college we wanted. Plans we had are no longer an option. Life is always changing, and it often doesn't go the way we think it will. Just last month I walked into the Christmas decorating potluck here at Holy Trinity expecting a couple dozen people, and instead more than *fifty* people showed up, and we couldn't fit everyone, and it was chaos.

In those moments, when things aren't happening the way we want and going according to our expectations, we have a choice. We can be resentful and anxious and upset, or we can be open to seeing how God is at work. We know which way Jesus chose – despite just wanting to relax at the party, he realized this was an opportunity to serve the people at the wedding, to do something amazing and help them believe.

Jesus was constantly interrupted during his time on this earth, and to be honest, that's when most of his ministry happened. Often interruptions and things not going as planned are really the Holy Spirit knocking on our hearts. Calling us to pay attention, to be open, to see where God is at work outside of our expectations, and to celebrate and join in. That's what happened at our Christmas potluck, and when I got past my anxiety over the chaos, I saw God's Spirit moving in our community as we gathered in joy, young and old, people who have been here forever and people who are new in our community, celebrating and eating and decorating.

It wasn't what I had planned, but something more beautiful was happening. God was at work. It might not have lasted seven days, but God was with us, keeping the party going.

And like the wine Jesus changed at the wedding, when we remain open to what God is doing, when we let go of our expectations and respond to the leading of God's Spirit, it turns out *better* than our plans and expectations. Life is better and richer and more fulfilling. I mean, look at the cross. *No one* expected the Messiah to die on a cross. It certainly wasn't part of any human plan – in fact, it was against *every* plan the disciples had drawn up, it felt like an interruption of the good that Jesus was trying to accomplish, it seemed like a total disaster and fiasco – *and yet*. It was on that cross when Jesus' hour finally came (John 13:1, 17:1), the hour when God brought salvation and forgiveness and healing for us all. From death came life, and it was nothing that we could had planned, and it was better than anything we could have imagined. Amen.