

SERMON A Miracle of Abundance, Extravagance and Celebration

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Scripture

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.

Sermon A Miracle of Abundance, Extravagance and Celebration

Jesus was not ready. He was attending a wedding with his mother and his friends. He was a guest. He was there to share in that celebration, which in his day and culture, could last a week. But at some point during that celebration, the wine had run out. And his mother wanted him to do something about it.

But when Jesus' mother told him that the bride and groom had run out of wine, Jesus told her that his "hour had not yet come." Jesus even sounded a little rude, calling his mother "Woman" and asking what difference it made to him. What did it matter? He was a guest. It wasn't his responsibility to rectify this situation.

Maybe Jesus thought there was a more significant way to begin his ministry than to fix the problem of not enough wine at a wedding. Or maybe he was concerned that people would see him as a magician, not the Messiah. Or maybe he needed his mother to know that he was a

grown man, that he would make the decision as to when he would perform his first miracle and what it would be.

In John's gospel, this was Jesus' first miracle or sign, as John would call it. It happened on the third day of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist on the first day. He called disciples on the second day. And he was at this wedding in Cana on the third day.

In John's gospel there was no time in the wilderness and no reading in the synagogue to begin Jesus' ministry. As yet there had been no healings or teaching to the crowds. Jesus was baptized, called his disciples and went to a wedding with his mother and his disciples. Then the wine ran out. And Jesus told his mother that it was not his problem, it was not his time.

But Jesus' mother had a different idea. She believed that he was ready to reveal his identity or at least ready reveal that he had gifts to share. She had faith in her son. His mother did not tell Jesus how to address the problem. She believed that he would know what to do. She knew that he had the power to change things.

So, she told the servants to listen to him and follow his instructions. She said, "Do whatever he tells you."

Jesus may have been reluctant at first, but he came through and performed a miracle. He made it his concern that there was no wine. He made it his concern that there could have been embarrassment, discomfort, and disappointment. He made the potentially awkward situation his concern. And he brought joy. While it may seem frivolous, it would have been important to the bride and groom, to their family and friends, to the community in attendance at the time.

Weddings are special times in the everyday lives of people – then and now. Each wedding is unique. Each family has their own way of celebrating. But I think that most couples and families had concerns then and have concerns now that something could go wrong on that special day.

In our day, we see or hear about those times when things go wrong. They are the stuff reality TV or America's Funniest Home Videos are made of. Or we hear words like, 'Did you hear about what happened at so and so's wedding..?' We hear when the unplanned and unpleasant happen, when the celebration is interrupted.

Well, there was no reality TV or home video in Jesus' time. But weddings were a time of celebration, of gathering of family and friends that centered on asking God to bless this union of two people. Weddings were a reason to celebrate a loving relationship and to ask of God to

bless that relationship and that love. Relationships are important. Celebration of God's presence in them is important. Celebration is important.

Despite his initial reluctance, Jesus changed the water into wine – not ordinary wine and not just enough to hold them over until the reception finished. Jesus changed the water into really good wine and lots of it - somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons. That would have been enough for everyone at that wedding, at any point in that celebration.

And then Jesus' disciples believed in him.

Jesus' first miracle was one of abundance. Jesus changed the water into more than enough wine. There was lots of wine, plenty of wine, an abundance of wine.

Jesus' first miracle was one of extravagance. Jesus' wine was better than the chief steward had expected, better than what had been drunk earlier in that celebration. The best wine. Extravagant wine.

Jesus' first miracle was one of celebration. Jesus continued the celebration, in effect, blessing that celebration and contributing to the joy of the occasion.

Abundance. Extravagance. Celebration.

Isn't that what Jesus is about, what our God became human to show us: Abundance. We have received blessings in abundance from our God. And Jesus taught his followers about the need for us to share those blessings with those who do not have what we have.

Extravagance. Our God offers extravagant love for all people. God does not base God's love on the worthiness of people. Jesus showed us that God loves all people. He showed extravagant love for saints and sinners, Jews and Samaritans, tax collectors and Roman officers, those with physical illness and those possessed by demons.

Celebration. Stars, angels, lowly shepherds and wise men from a distant land celebrated Jesus birth. Anna and Simeon proclaimed the fulfillment of God's promise in the temple and praised God with joy in their hearts. God's Word had become flesh.

On the occasion of this wedding, Jesus brought joy through changing water into abundant and extravagant wine. His life would be one of abundance and extravagance- feeding the multitudes, healing various condition. Those miracles would bring joy. He would also offer extravagant and abundant forgiveness, forgiving even those who crucified him. And on a

different third day, the third day after he died, Jesus would conquer death through his resurrection, a new life of love beyond our imagination. A reason for great joy and celebration.

How about us? Our God offers us abundant blessings and extravagant love, radical forgiveness, and the joy of knowing our Lord is alive and walking beside us. Do we live in ways that reflect our gratitude and demonstrate our faith by sharing abundantly, loving extravagantly, forgiving readily, and living joyfully? Are we ready?

What if we follow Mary's simple advice to the servants at that wedding banquet? She told them to listen to him, "Do whatever he tells you."

Jesus told them, 'Fill the jars with water.' The servants did; filling those jars to the brim. Then he said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' And they did. They were simple instructions, pretty basic for servers at a wedding.

So, what if we listened and heard Jesus instructions to the servers as instructions for our lives. What if we fill the jars of our lives, with essential elements of life – elements that are as essential as water? What if we fill our lives with love, peace, forgiveness and righteousness? What if we then draw from our jars and bring what we have to others - as individuals or as a community of Jesus' followers?

Nataliana is a young woman who got pregnant when she was 16 and had to drop out of school. She had to choose between leaving school and raising her daughter or having the State take her daughter away from her. At age 21 she became a dancer and made a living by dancing for 10 years. But her daughter was watching her and she wanted to be a better role model, to do something better with her life. So she applied to the Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport's Create Culinary Program. She graduated from the program and is now a chef in the program. She says that when she puts on her chef uniform she feels "great, like I can do something great." She hopes to someday have her own kitchen to cook for the homeless because she wants them to "eat good food, made with love. Before I die, I want to become something great, to be known as somebody who helps."

Tusweet is a 39 year old man from Bridgeport who went to jail for 17 years for robbery that he committed as a young man. He had a hard life and admits he got attracted to the wrong things – drugs and violence – and the wrong people and it got him in trouble. When he was arrested his son was a year old. While he was in prison, he lost his family, including contact with his son. He learned a lot in prison, changed his ways and was determined to change his life. He said, "I just wanted to do good." When he was released, he connected with Projecto Nueva Vida. He said that he felt loved. He said, "I felt alive." He could turn to his Projecto Nueva Vida person

whenever he needed help; help to better himself and to move on. He has turned his life around, has a job with a liquor distributor and has even become involved with his son who has given him reason to live. He is now a former client of Proyecto Nueva Vida. He has taken control of his life. He has something to live for and he has hope.

The Create Culinary Program has trained 90 disadvantaged adults to be chefs. Proyecto Nueva Vida provides re-entry services to 240 individuals per year. The lives of the individuals who have graduated from these Council Churches of Greater Bridgeport programs have been transformed. They are part of the holistic approach offered by that organization and individuals which offer extravagant and abundant support to persons who struggle; providing creative opportunities and advocating for legislative solutions to problems that plague those persons. *

Jesus began his ministry by turning water into wine. Programs and individuals who reach out to the disadvantaged or those who are struggling perform miracles that transform lives. Jesus' miracle of abundance and extravagance brought joy to those at the wedding. Individuals and programs that offer abundant and extravagant support to those who struggle bring hope and joy. That's reason for celebration for all.

So let us take to heart these words from the apostle Paul. "And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work." (2 Corinthians 9.8)

* Individual Stories and program Statistics obtained from Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport website: <https://www.ccg.org>