

## ***A Rockin' Party***

John 2:1-11

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The gospel according to John tells the Jesus story differently than the other three gospels, with a particular understanding about Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, according to John, is the eternal Word of God made flesh. So the Word of God, that was expressed by the words "let there be" at the dawn of creation, the Word of God that made light and earth and life, came into the world in Jesus Christ, to make known the way, the truth, and the life of God.

After Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan, some men became impressed with him, and followed him, the first of the disciples. They recognized him as the Lamb of God, the Son of God, the King of Israel, the Messiah, the fulfillment of God's promises in Moses and the prophets of old. And in the verse that precedes what we read today, Jesus makes sure these impressed followers know they ain't seen nothin' yet. You will see greater things....' Jesus said, "you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." You will see heaven opened, said Jesus, and then we read on...

### **John 2:1-11 (NRSV)**

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. <sup>2</sup>Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. <sup>3</sup>When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' <sup>4</sup>And Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.' <sup>5</sup>His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' <sup>6</sup>Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. <sup>7</sup>Jesus said to them, 'Fill the jars with water.' And they filled them up to the brim. <sup>8</sup>He said to them, 'Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.' So they took it. <sup>9</sup>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 <sup>10</sup>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.' <sup>11</sup>Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

In John's account, this is the first miracle of Jesus' ministry. It's almost like a starter miracle, turning water into wine, when eventually he'll be raising from the dead. But in the end of our text for today, John notes this was more than a secondary miracle, this was the first of his SIGNS, this was a story that points to something else, something more to come.

Revealed in this story, says John, is Christ's glory, a glory that is defined by GRACE. It wasn't a life-saving miracle, this was a joy-giving, honoring miracle. So much of Christ's work witnessed for us in the gospels has as its end healing or teaching or proving, but this seems to have as its end JOY and TOGETHERNESS. This was a miracle that brought out the truly good stuff in the end. We need to cherish this passage about God's purposes of joy.

One Sunday a woman worshipped in a prestigious Presbyterian church, sitting down near the front. During the service something inspired her to stand up and say "Hallelujah!" An usher rushed down the aisle, tapped her on the shoulder, and asked her, "Are you all right?" Then, he tried to get her up out of the pew and up the aisle. She said, "I'm fine. I've just got the Spirit this morning!" He replied, "Well, you certainly didn't get it here!" We should be careful in our community life together to provide plenty of space for joy and spirit!

As Mother Theresa said, "one filled with joy preaches without preaching." Joy can be a powerful and unsettling spirit breaking into a static world, and joy can be a powerful protest against the way life seems most of the time. Christ brings to the wedding at Cana something unprecedented in the tradition, turning water into wine, offering a miracle of abundance, of extravagance, of transformation, and new possibilities (ODAY).

This is new stuff, says the sign of this miracle, changing stuff, that's gonna change the way you and I see the world.

This miracle, this sign, also calls us to a new way of seeing ourselves. I venture to say that most of us remember this passage by its headline, "Jesus turns water into wine." But it's funny how much of the Bible becomes clear if we'll just read it. Did you notice that Jesus didn't do anything to the water? This first miracle of Jesus, this sign of the way things will be, was guided by Jesus but actually carried out by others in the story.

First, it was Mary who identified the problem and said something about it, "they have no more wine." Something wasn't right, it was embarrassing and dishonoring to run out of wine, and the joy of the wedding party would run out. Her heart went out to the hosts and guests, and so she turned to Jesus and said something. Part of change is standing up and telling the truth about what isn't right.

Jesus pointed out to Mary, calling her "woman" which was an address of respect, that his cosmic time had not yet come, so what could he do about the problem of a wedding out of wine? But Mary, again the catalyst, seems to know Jesus will not stand still. She instructs the staff, "do whatever he tells you." Mary perhaps knew that while the hour of Jesus had not yet come, the hour for those who follow Jesus is already upon us.

And so the work of transformation began. Jars were carried and filled to the brim with water, wine was drawn out, and declared the best wine by the steward. They had everything they needed with them, jars, water, and each other. And a community generated miracle of abundance and joy ensued. So perhaps we can remember a different headline for the wedding at Cana: followers of Jesus turn water into wine.

In this week dominated by images and stories out of Haiti, where destruction and death and bleeding continue, it feels a bit odd to focus on a story about Jesus' minor miracle at a wedding. When we're praying for major miracles, the sparing of lives, the eradication of poverty, we are not in the place of a wedding's joy, not interested, it would seem, in the miracle of abundant wine.

OR perhaps this is exactly the text for a week like this, reminding us that every miracle matters, because the little miracles signify God's transformative power at work in the world, and point toward a day when joy abounds. And while the power at work is God's, says our text for today, there is place for us in miracle working.

Phillip Brooks was a great Episcopalian priest in Boston, known to some of us today as the author of the Christmas hymn, "O Little Town of Bethlehem." On a cold day in Philadelphia, Brooks passed a young boy standing on a street corner selling newspapers. The boy was shivering, so Brooks approached him and said, "Good morning!" He bought a paper, but then asked about the boy's family, asking about his life, looking at him, acknowledging that this moment and this encounter and this boy really mattered (how many of us really take the time to do that with a stranger?). And after a few minutes, the distinguished pastor was making small talk, when he said, "it sure is a cold day," to which the boy replied, "it was, until you came along, mister." Little miracles, like a new relationship on a cold day, can change things, and the way we see things.

There is also an unmistakable message in today's text about community, and how coming together in faithfulness allows us to take part in the miracle of transformation. Every time we gather for worship or learning or fellowship, and trust in the presence of Christ in these places, we unleash the potential to change ourselves and our community and our world. Tomorrow we will commemorate the life and legacy of a preacher and community organizer who knew the transformative and liberative power of Christ in community. "We are caught up in an inescapable web of mutuality," Dr. King said, "tied in a single garment of destiny."

Our sense of being tied in a single garment of destiny is why we work to serve each other and others who have special needs or are struggling under the weight of poverty. Little miracles happen when we do this, a meal bringing together people from different backgrounds, money to fund medicine in developing countries, or care kits delivered to some far corner of the earth from complete strangers. And so we ask ourselves, facing images of poverty and neglect and destruction in a faraway place, who will speak the truth? Who will carry the water, who will fill the jars, who will draw the wine? Trusting in God, we have little miracles at hand,

which may not by themselves change the world, but by God they will refuse to let the world stop until the great joy comes.

You will see heaven opened, said Jesus.