

“Lemons Into Lemonade & Water Into Wine”

C Epiphany Two; John 2:1-11

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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.

I. ONCE UPON A WEDDING FEAST

Well, here we are, making our way through this Epiphany season at the first of the year. The scripture stories in the Lectionary and the outline for walking with Jesus through his ministry after Christmas feels a little like a “Reader’s Digest version of the gospel and a lot like a run-on sentence!

It’s also an exciting season—because it doesn’t stop! So much good stuff to celebrate—and we’ve been doing it right here, right along with Jesus – with Epiphany and Baptism and now today, a wedding party! A quick look back over our shoulders:

And....Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as the prophets foretold.

And, then, when he was twelve, he freaked out his parents by not practicing the buddy-system in Jerusalem and not returning their texts and tweets, and finally being found in *church* of all places!

And, then, when he was grown, he went down to the river to pray, and was baptized by John.

And, a dove landed on his shoulder and announced that he wasn’t just any ordinary young man, but “on a mission from God” (to quote The Blues Brothers), and.....

Then, he went to a party!

But not just *any* party for a young man and his friends. You see, *mom* was there! Mother Mary herself. And this was not just some Friday night party that young guys might go to in order to rub elbows and share some laughs and check out some young women. This was a wedding feast! A BIG party! Often lasting for several days, if not weeks!

And, Jesus was *not* just your everyday guest at this big party –though no one *knew* that yet. Oh, Mom knew he was special, but what mother doesn't? What mother doesn't think (or wish!) that *her* son is the *life* of the party—the most handsome and helpful one there – well, second to the groom, anyway!

And, then.....the unthinkable happens. The wine runs out. Not just the reds or the whites, so that you could quick bring in a substitute, or tell the people to not be so picky about color, or try a beer instead.

Not just a minor inconvenience –someone surely could run out to the liquor store. Not just a good excuse to close the bar early and relieve the host of some responsibility for over-serving – you don't want to be responsible for drunk camel-driving!

Nope. In those times and in that culture, running out of wine too early wasn't just a social *faux pas* or embarrassment. It was a disaster. Hospitality was *so* revered, so vital to their social structure, even survival, that this would actually bring *shame* upon the hosts – *scorn* for the families of the bride and groom.

Remember – they didn't have a lot of beverage options – there weren't cases of Nestle bottled water in the back room that could just be pulled out. This wasn't about *one* of the taps running dry out of many options.

Now, back to Mother Mary. She gets wind of this outage, and goes immediately to her firstborn, beloved son, because she knows he can “do something about it.”

It gets a little tense for a minute –“Awww, Mom!!! Why are you *bothering* me? What does this have to do with *me?!?*” “Can't you see I'm hanging out here with my friends? I got my chores done hours ago!”

And then.....not a magic spell. Not a parlor trick or a party surprise, but *something* happened! A sign broke forth in that moment. A wonder, a pointing to something greater than had been known before. A sign of what life should be. Could be. A glimpse of the Kingdom.

Delicious, overflowing, abundant wine. Pouring out, flowing down like a mighty river. This is no “additional couple bottles from the cellar.” This is more wine that the whole crowd could even *begin* to drink during that wedding feast. Maybe *1000* bottles of wine?!

Why? Why does Jesus do this “not a party trick” in their midst? Why *this* sign –as one of the first wonders of his ministry?

A hint comes if you look at what comes *next*. You know what the very next thing Jesus does in this, John's gospel? It's different from the other gospels—where he does this “next thing” all the way down the road at the *end* of his ministry, upon his entry into Jerusalem. Here, in John 2, verse 12 and following, he *turns the tables in the Temple!!*

I submit that Jesus was just getting an early start on that ever-so-important thing he does: totally turning over *everything* that we thought was important or we thought we had figured out. About God. About faith. About how the world works and our role in it.

How, you say? Remember the seriousness of the situation, according to social norms and customs? That *shame*; that complete disaster for the hosts' status and standing in the community that this beverage supply error would cause?

Remember the times: That was a purity culture with strict rules and social mores, that went right along with the religion's Holiness Code. You could not *separate* social customs with religious rites and rules like we do in our day—they were all bound up together.

So this story, this curious event at the start of Jesus' ministry was *not* an amusing stunt or some justification for drinking alcohol (as many preachers have tried to make it over the years), but a radical subversion of “The System.” The worldview. The conventional wisdom and workings of the day.

In turning that party upside down, like he did the tables in the Temple, Jesus declared a whole new way of being, living, loving, treating one another—in the spirit of God that was upon him. He *challenged* that system of purity and shame and said, “No more!”

“Here! You need some wine to keep celebrating life and love and families uniting?! ou, you hosts, do you need to be restored to wholeness and inclusion in the community again—to be *saved*? Let me show you God's idea of a party! Let's see what God's kingdom looks like – here and now!”

“Not cheap, tasteless wine in little drops. Meant to numb your tastebuds after a few hours so you don't even know what you're drinking or doing. How about the *best* wine you've ever tasted, and enough to last weeks beyond *this* party?”

“Let's take those 30-gallon jugs over there – and set aside all those exhausting rituals and purity requirements, and let's have some wine!! Let's celebrate life! Life in abundance!”

Phillip Yancey reminds us that John makes a point of noting that the “wine came from huge thirty-gallon jugs that stood full of water at the front of the house, vessels that were used by observant Jews to fulfill the rules on ceremonial washing. Even a wedding feast had to honor the burdensome rituals of cleansing. Jesus, perhaps with a twinkle in his eye, *transformed* those jugs, ponderous symbols of the old way, into wineskins, harbingers of the new. From purified water of the Pharisees came the choice

new wine of a whole new era. The time for ritual cleansing had passed; the time for celebration had begun.”

(Adapted from Phillip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1995, p. 168.)

II. TRANSFORMATION

So, today, on this wild romp through the gospels and Jesus’ ministry kick-off, we’re “in the wine” for awhile. Considering, smelling, tasting, marveling at the aroma, the bouquet, and the wonder that Jesus plunges right in to turning everything upside down about life and community with this fruit of the vine, this gift from the earth—of all things!

And this, obviously, is *not* about literal wine –well, at least not *all* of it – actually, I wish we could each have just a little glass of wine in front of us as we reflect how water changes to wine.....

(And *don’t* go home today and say, “Preacher told us we need to drink more!” It’s a metaphor! We’re all clear on that, right?!)

Jesus told us to “consider the lilies; consider the sparrows.....andconsider the wine.”

Water turned into wine – a metaphor for so much of life.

Water into wine.....when has it happened in *your* life? When have you helped Spirit make it happen for someone else?

In our vernacular nowadays, we might call it “Making lemonade out of lemons.”

Can you think of a time or place where water has been turned to wine? For you by others, with God’s help, or *by* you—when you made a choice to dance instead of mope, create instead of crush? Where has water turned to wine, lemons to lemonade, in your home, hood, or wider world?

Ponder that awhile. Or do some homework this week and look around you and share with me or a friend.

III. TURNING WINE INTO WATER

There’s a flip side to this too—that bears reflecting on for a moment.

Sören Kierkegaard, 19th century

"Christ turned water into wine, but the church has succeeded in doing something even *more* difficult: it has turned wine into water."

Oooh.....I don’t like to hear that! Do you? There’s a Challenge to us!! As we’re looking around for where water turns to wine, let’s be sure we don’t turn Wine into Water!!!

Let’s start there and get the negative out of the way.

Do you ever find –in your life or church or community group—that wine is being turned into water? That some force or faction is “raining on your parade?” Where do parades get rained on rather than expanded and celebrated?

When someone comes to us or our circle with an idea—do they get a response of: “Wow!.....I wonder how we can make this work?!” Or, is it, “Hmmm.....I can tell you all sorts of reasons why that’ll never work?” Or, “we’ve tried that before!” (I know I’m guilty of this!)

I think Soren Kierkegaard must have known about that mantra of the church!

Are we “possibility thinkers” as Norman Vincent Peale coined the term many years ago? Or, do we deflate one another’s bubbles, out of fear that they’ll get too *inflated*?! When we squelch one another’s spirits, creativity or bright ideas, we are turning wine into water.

IV. TURNING WATER INTO WINE

Enough of that! Let’s look at some happy examples of transformation –in the *right* direction.

A. Old Stump into Library! See article

An artist in Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, is charming the Internet with her repurposing of an old rotting tree.

Sharalee Armitage Howard had a 100-plus year old cottonwood tree rotting outside of her home. The tree was becoming dangerous but rather than cut it down completely she decided to make it into something the whole neighborhood could enjoy. “We had to remove a huge tree that was over 110 years old, so I decided to turn it into a little free library, which I’ve always wanted!

I’ve put the article and amazing pictures up on the bulletin board so you can see this amazing example.

This sure reminded me of something Bob Smith would do! Yesterday, we looked at *his* many ways of turning water to wine –in countless wood projects where an old, broken-down chair or dresser or sewing table that was missing legs and essential pieces was transformed in the Master’s hand to something beautiful, useful, and restored. If you haven’t seen Bob’s photo album – I call it the Before and After Bible – ask Norma to show it to you sometime. It’s inspiring reading!

B. Our Church

Our church: We/you/all of us are turning water into wine for our church and our community! Everything from new toilets and renewed bathrooms and gathering halls to inspiring education events, to mission projects to feeding, housing and clothing.

We turn water into wine when.....

*We take something old and cast off—even smelly!— and turn it into a thing of beauty. A stole of old neckties, carefully and thoughtfully washed, cut and pieced together into a vestment for the leader of worship. A symbol not only of the old and cast off being made into something new and beautiful to *wear*, but a metaphor for what God does with *us* – our lives. No matter how cast off. No matter how old, out of fashioned, smelly or useless we might think we are, God *always* has a pattern and a project in mind for our one precious, holy life.

*We celebrate winter! We can either focus on being cold, stuck inside, limited in our outings and activities—not to mention daylight! Or, we can revel in the beauty, the moisture refreshing the earth, the stunning sights and the great skiing and snowshoeing! (The dogs think snow is a gift straight from Heaven.)

The colors of winter are like no other. There is no such thing as bad weather only poor clothing, so bundle up and get out there and enjoy the beauty of the snow this weekend. (Kimmie Randall)

*We scoop up the shock and pain and tears of a loved one's death, and gather all together into a holy gathering –a Celebration of Life! When we keep the memories alive, tell the stories, live out the learnings and legacies of the ones who have gone before us into the Cloud of Witnesses, we turn the water of ordinary earthly life into the wine of Heaven. Weeping is *transformed* into new ways of honoring, remembering, celebrating and making present.

*We celebrate new life with new clothes and celebrate big! The Baptism here last week of three incredible young spirits was a party just like Jesus' party in Cana in Galilee!

*We take our challenges –like not enough people to do too much ministry—and turn the tables on our rules and limitations, and find that Jesus gives us more than enough to accomplish all God calls us to do—and more!

Those are just a few of the examples we see around here. There's so much more. And so much more that will happen – as water is turned to wine in our midst – in our congregation and community. Look for it!

V. COMMUNITY EFFORT

Back to Jesus at the wedding. One essential piece of this story we might have missed – if we weren't intimately familiar with all the social customs and expectations.

That wedding feast was a potluck! Oops. We read this story and assume the family of the bride and groom weren't very good event planners or too cheap at the store. Why on earth didn't they prepare well—like a good Scout should?

Lindsey Trozzo nails it:

However, it was ancient custom for guests to bring wedding gifts in the form of food and drink to share the burden of providing for such a large group. Thus, the family's lack of wine may indicate a lack of community support in addition to their own lack of resources.

It's a failure to communicate and collaborate! A lack of shared hospitality, of teamwork, of showing up and sharing.

And, Jesus, one of the team, responds to this scene of scarcity with a sign of overflowing abundance! Surprising amounts of the best resources imaginable. God takes our times of feeling unsupported—when the

party guests don't show, or don't bring all they're supposed to bring with them, and pours out more than enough.

Where the potluck/BYOB was a FAIL!! When the guests, family or community let you down, Jesus steps in!

Why? Because his very life and spirit were a spirit of abundance, not scarcity! Jesus doesn't *just* turn tables at the END of his ministry –in the Temple. But here, at a party –his first big act to make a point at the beginning of his ministry – turning over the purity system –the shame-based social traditions – rules and expectations transformed to rivers of resplendent beauty and celebration.

God is no slacker!!

Expect surprisingly good and abundant things to come in this new year! In Jesus' ministry with us!

“May all that is reduced to noise in you become music again.”

May all that has been mere water, the mundane requirements and strictures of life—become fine wine, flowing in abundance, bringing you celebration where there once was sorrow, life where there was loss and longing before. Amen.