

Year C 2nd Sunday after Epiphany John 2:1-11 (The Wedding at Cana)

This story of the wedding at Cana is only found in the Gospel of John and it is Jesus' first act of public ministry in that Gospel. Each of the gospel writers uses a different story to begin Jesus' public ministry – Matthew starts with the Sermon on the Mount, for Mark it's an exorcism, and for Luke, it's Jesus' return to his hometown. The different stories provide details that each Gospel writer believes best represents who Jesus is for them and what they want to say about his ministry. All of the little details in John's Gospel story have been carefully placed there for good reason. John is telling us some very important things about Jesus - and therefore, God – and also about God's kingdom.

First of all, when Jesus' mother points out to him that the newly married couple has run out of wine for their guests, Jesus basically says, "So what? I'm not ready to make myself known yet." His mother completely ignores this and instructs the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them to do. And Jesus does do something. He feels the pull of human need – he cares that the newlyweds will be embarrassed and likely have to pay a fine for this social blunder and so he helps them.

We have heard, throughout our lives as churchgoers, that our God is an unchanging God – always the same. For some reason, this often gets translated into "God never changes his mind on anything. God makes a decision or judgment and that's final for all eternity." Many people believe that the decision they made 30 or 40 years ago, or more, based on what they thought Scripture was telling them cannot change. The church has its fair share of unbending, unchanging people because they believe they are doing what God would have them do – stick

to a decision, stick to a judgement, cling to a tradition – God is unchanging, we must be likewise.

Scripture does not dictate thoughts and behaviours in black and white as people may think it does. Scripture does not show to us a God who never changes his mind, never alters a decision, never alters a judgement. But God doesn't change his mind willy-nilly. The examples we find in Scripture of God changing his mind are always for the sake of compassion – a compassion that includes and embraces, a compassion that gives people another chance at salvation, to show to people what life in his kingdom is like. If it weren't for Moses pleading with God to change his mind about killing the Israelites – on multiple occasions – those wayward Israelites would have been wiped out in the wilderness several times over. God listened to Moses and changed his mind. God showed compassion.

In today's Gospel story, we see a God who is full of compassion and who changes his mind. Jesus' initial response to his mother indicates that he's got a timetable of his own in his head and his "hour" wasn't about to unfold at this wedding. He was thinking ahead to the big event – his hour, meaning the hour of his death – but he allowed himself to be swayed by compassion for others, to change his mind and to tend to the much more trivial matter of running out of wine at a wedding because it mattered to the people he cared about.

Our goal as Christians is to pattern ourselves after the one for whom we are named – the Christ, Jesus. We are to strive to become more and more like Jesus who is God in the flesh. And so, to pattern ourselves after Jesus we are shown that we are to be a compassionate people – a compassion that that includes and

embraces, a compassion that gives people another chance at salvation, to show to people what life in God's kingdom is like.

What does this story tell us about life in God's kingdom? John tells us, "On the third day there was a wedding in Cana." There are certain number phrases in the bible that are full of significance and this one, "On the third day" is loaded with meaning. We are meant to think, of course, of the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day. The sign of turning the water into wine, and the other signs throughout John's Gospel, point us toward the greatest sign of the kingdom – Jesus' resurrection, brought to life by the Spirit in glory never to die again. Life in God's kingdom is an everlasting life. Each sign throughout John's Gospel reveals something about this everlasting life.

This sign in our story today tells us that life in God's kingdom is a life enjoying God's abundance. Jesus asks the servants to fill six jars with water – jars that hold 20 to 30 gallons each. That's 120 to 180 gallons of wine that Jesus made for the wedding. That is an abundance of wine that will not run out. Then, of course, the quality is pointed out to us...it's the very best wine. Next, we realize that the miracle was based in the commonplace – nothing special was used – it was normal, everyday water in normal, everyday jars. This reminds us that we are surrounded by God's kingdom and even the most commonplace in that kingdom are a source of glory and joy for God and a source of glory and joy for us.

Not only that, we – as part of the commonplace – are a source of glory and joy for God. We are the clay pots, Paul tells us, clay pots filled with treasure (2 Cor.4:7), filled with God's abundance to share with others, remembering that they too, though they look like clay pots, they too are God's creation. Today's story

reminds us that the abundance of God's kingdom is not just an abundance of material things – food, water, wine. God's kingdom is filled with abundant compassion and love that we are to share with others. Today's miracle story – the sign pointing to the abundance of the everlasting life of God's kingdom – is a story that happens in community.

Throughout his life, Jesus continuously went about the business of building a community – a community of believers welcomed into the kingdom by his love and compassion who, in turn, lived a life of love and compassion for others. Paul's letters continuously bring us back to this idea of community in the kingdom. All of us are given gifts, he tells us, gifts meant for the building up of the common good. Words alone cannot stress enough the importance of this communal nature of our faith...one body for we all share in the one bread...We are in it together or we are not in it at all.

We know the drill...or, we think we do: Love one another as Christ has loved us. Love your enemies. Love your neighbour as yourself. Samuel Colgate, the founder of the Colgate business empire, was a devout Christian, and he told of an incident that took place in the church he attended. During an evangelistic service, an invitation was given at the close of the sermon to all those who wished to turn their lives over to Christ and be forgiven. One of the first persons to walk down the aisle and kneel at the altar was a well-known prostitute. She knelt in very real repentance, she wept, she asked God to forgive her, and meanwhile the rest of the congregation looked on approvingly at what she was doing. Then she stood and testified that she believed God had forgiven her for her past life, and she now wanted to become a member of the church. For a few moments, the silence was

deafening.

Finally, Samuel Colgate arose and sarcastically chastised the others in the pews.

"I guess we blundered when we prayed that the Lord would save sinners," he said. "We forgot to specify what kind of sinners. We'd better ask him to forgive us for this oversight. The Holy Spirit has touched this woman and made her truly repentant, but the Lord apparently doesn't understand that she's not the type we want him to rescue. We'd better spell it out for him just which sinners we had in mind." Immediately, a motion was made and unanimously approved that the woman be accepted into membership in the congregation.

God's love and compassion is for everyone – even those we profess to love but would feel uncomfortable having next to us in the pew.

Perhaps you noticed that Jesus doesn't check to make sure that the water has, indeed, changed into wine. He doesn't look into the jars just to make sure. He doesn't taste a sample just to make sure. He has absolutely no doubt that the water is now wine. John is telling us that that is the kind of faith and trust that we can have in God. We are clay jars that have the very best wine, an abundance of wine that will never run out. We can lavish that wine on everyone around us, even when it means changing our minds to be more inclusive, to give everyone a chance at salvation, to show the world what it is to live in God's kingdom. Jesus did this and revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him. Let us reveal his glory that the world may believe.