

Year C Second Sunday after the Epiphany The Best Wine John 2 vv1 to 11

Jesus has turned water into wine and most people refer to this as a miracle. John does not. John calls this a sign – it is the first sign that Jesus does in his public ministry in John’s Gospel story. John calls this a sign because he wants to us to realize what it is a sign of and reflect more deeply on what we learn about God and God’s kingdom. So, that is exactly what we are going to do.

“On the third day,” John begins. This is a flashing neon sign and clanging bell that the Gospel writers so love to put in front of us. “On the third day” is what we say together every single worship service when we say one of the creeds. “On the third day he rose again.” John is saying to us, sit up straight and pay attention – something important is about to happen and, yes, it is connected to Jesus’ resurrection.

Next, we hear, “there was a wedding.” Again, with the neon sign and clanging bells. Weddings are also very significant when talking about God and God’s kingdom. The relationship between God and his people is often described as a marriage in scripture. We, the Church, are referred to as the Bride of Christ. Each has promised to love and be faithful to the other. As we heard in Isaiah, despite the fact that people are unfaithful to God, God is ever loving and faithful and we *are* heading toward the time when we will be “married” to God without the thoughts or the urge to stray.

With a wedding on the third day, John has set us up to expect important information about our relationship with God and he certainly does not disappoint. He, in fact, delivers with gusto...

The wedding celebration has been going on for days and the groom has run out of wine to give to his guests. That was a horrendous social blunder that would have been the cause for great embarrassment, something that would be a shadow over the couple's new life together. The mother of Jesus – never named as Mary in this Gospel, only spoken of by the relationship she shared with Jesus – she turns to Jesus and she points out this disastrous turn of events and Jesus basically says, "So what?" "What's that got to do with me?" he says. "My hour has not yet come." By "hour", Jesus is referring to his death and resurrection. That is "the" big showstopper event in his life and in our story of salvation. When his mother first turns to him, he's not ready to display his glory in any other way.

His mother turns to the servants, though, and tells them to do whatever he says. Through their intimate relationship of parent and child, she knows he will act. She knows the compassionate, loving heart of her child and, clearly, she also is aware that is more to him. She knows who he is. And Jesus does choose to act. In other instances scattered through John's Gospel, he makes it clear that when Jesus acts, it is because he has the authority and power to act – not because someone pushes him into it.

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, God created all things, and even the most commonplace of these things in the

kingdom are a source of glory and joy for God and a source of glory and joy for us. God can and does use whatever, whenever, to show forth his glory in the world.

We, too, are part of God's creation – a part of the commonplace – and we 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 those others, though they look like clay pots, they too are God's creation.

What we might miss in this story, if we're not thinking of it, is the complete lack of showmanship in this astounding event. Jesus calls no attention to himself. He does not speak any special words. He does not touch the water jars. He doesn't check to make sure something has happened. He doesn't even say out-loud what he is doing. If you had not heard this story before, you'd be just as surprised as the steward when he first tastes the wine. In these moments, when Jesus reveals his divinity, he is also, at the same time, revealing something about his humanity.

What we see – in addition to the care and compassion for the newly married couple – is humility, quiet confidence, absolute trust in God the Father, doing God's work for God and not for human onlookers, desiring God's praise and not human praise. He is not doing this in secret. There were lots of people watching. But he was not doing it for their praise.

These qualities we see in Jesus are the qualities of life found in God's kingdom because, of course, Jesus carries the kingdom. And so, even more than these personal qualities, we are shown that life in God's kingdom is a life of abundance. The everyday things around us are given to us in extravagant abundance by our God who loves us. Everyone will have enough and we won't need to stockpile

because what we need will never run out. And this life of care and compassion and abundance is a life lived in community. The whole village is invited to the wedding. The whole earth is invited to be in relationship with God. We are meant to be one body, one family – a community of believers.

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 are in it with a God who cares, who listens, and who responds to our needs and troubles. "When the guests were getting parched and the host nervous, and there was no recourse but to shut the party down, it is at this point that Jesus quietly intervenes. It may not have been the most convenient time for the Lord, but because of the need of the guests and the request of his mother, he will do what must be done, for that is why he came. God is responsive to people's needs" (Roy Harrisville, workingpreacher.org). People look at the state of the world and doubt the existence of God but this quiet miracle shows us that sometimes God does His work without taking out an ad in the paper. When we take the time to notice, signs of the kingdom fully arriving on earth as in heaven are out there.

"Heaven and earth are full of your glory," we sing to God as we prepare to share the bread and wine. "The whole earth is full of [God's] glory," the angels sing in

Isaiah. The earth *is* full of God's glory and, when we take the time to see it, we believe. The disciples saw his glory and they believed in him. It is not simply an intellectual assent with the head. To believe means a deep, personal trust in, and commitment to, God and God's promises. To believe is the result of this sign today. To believe is the reason John wrote his Gospel.

We are meant to take all that this story shows us about Jesus – his care, compassion, humility, devotion to God – take all of that and move toward it...our journey of transformation. And we are meant to take all that this story shows us about God's kingdom – the abundance, the relationship, the community – and move toward it...the Church transforming together.

Most importantly, we are meant to share it. Does the world see in you what we see in Jesus today? Does the world know what God's kingdom is like when they see us, the Church? The great missional bishop, Lesslie Newbiggin's says of us: "The church lives in the midst of history as a sign, instrument and foretaste of the reign of God." Our life together is a sign pointing to the coming fullness of God's kingdom. We are the foretaste that can be seen and experienced right now. And we are the instrument God uses to continue moving the world ever closer to the fulfillment of his purpose.

We are clay jars filled with the treasure of God. We are filled to the brim with the Holy Spirit. "You have kept the good wine until now." Let's share it with a thirsty world.