

Rev. Anne J. Scalfaro
9 January 2022

10:30 a.m. MT Worship
Second Sunday after Epiphany

Calvary Baptist Church
Denver, Colorado

“Good Wine All the Time”

First Sermon in the Eight-week Series: *What Jesus Serves Up*

John 2:1-11

New Revised Standard Version

“They have no wine.”

“With those words,” Father Michael Marsh writes, “Mary speaks a truth about our lives, a truth that at some point we all experience. There comes a day when the wine gives out. The glass is empty. The party is over. On that day, life seems empty and dry. There is no vibrancy or vitality. Nothing is growing or fermenting within us. Our world is colorless and tasteless. The bouquet of life is absent and we are living less than fully alive.”¹

“Where has the wine of your life given out?”²

Father Marsh continues, “Each one of us could tell a story about the day the wine gave out. It might be about the death of a loved one or the loss of a friendship or marriage. Some will speak about their search for

love and acceptance [or] describe their thirst for meaning and significance. Others will tell of their guilt, disappointments, [self-doubt, failures], or regrets. Many of the stories will be about fear of what is or what might be...Some will describe a longing and desire for something they cannot name or describe. The storyline of [suffering], unanswered prayer, doubts, or questions is known by most [all of us].”³

And collectively, to some extent, we are all feeling like the run has wine out. Weary and worry seem to be woven into the fabric of pandemic life like they belong there, as if they are the threads (no matter how thin) that are holding our days together.

Behind each of our stories is the hope and desire for a wedding [together] of [the frayed threads and shattered shards of our life.

¹ Michael K. Marsh, “Wine Time, A Sermon on John 2:1-11,” *Interrupting the Silence* (20 Jan. 2013), accessed on 9 Jan. 2022 at

<https://interruptingthesilence.com/2013/01/20/wine-time-a-sermon-on-john-21-11/>.

² Marsh, *ibid.*

³ Marsh, *ibid.*

And so as Father Marsh observes, “We come to the wedding at Cana not simply as guests and spectators, but as participants, as a bride or groom, seeking union, intimacy, wholeness, [healing, and fullness]. Despite our best efforts, good intentions, and hard work, however, it seems that the wine of our life is always giving out. No matter how often we refill it our glass remains empty. There is never enough wine. [And thus as life] wears on we become increasingly aware that we cannot replenish the wine from our own resources.”⁴

And it’s when we realize *that* truth – that we cannot replenish the wine *on our own* – that the miracle begins. Not just in this text – but in our lives.

When we realize we need Jesus, that need creates a thirst in us, a hunger in us to feast on what Jesus is serving up. And what is Jesus serving up? Well, as we’ll see in John’s gospel over the next eight weeks, Jesus is serving up the spiritual nourishment that our souls, and our world, need. Jesus is serving up what will help us live *fully alive*.

- Today Jesus serves up **Joy & Abundance** *as he turns water into wine at a Wedding* (John 2:1-11)
- Next week, he’ll serve up **Justice & Equity** (with a side of anger) *as he cleanses the Temple that’s become a marketplace* (John 2:13-25)
- Then he’ll serve up **Light & Truth** *as he visits with Nicodemus* (John 3:1-21)
- And **Living Water & Grace** *as he speaks with the Woman at the Well* (John 4:1-42) –
- As we move into February, he’ll serve up **Healing & Hope** – *as he makes well the official’s son & the paralyzed man by the pool* (John 4:46-54; 5:1-18)
- He’ll serve up himself as the **Bread of Life** *as he teaches the Disciples after the Feeding of the Five Thousand* (John 6:35-59)
- He’ll dish out **Spirit & Belief** *as he proclaims his authority even as ‘the authorities’ officers are sent to arrest him* (John 7:37-52)
- And he’ll give us some much needed **Sight & Insight** *as he restores vision to The Man Born Blind and the community that is watching* (John 9:1-41)

⁴ Marsh, *ibid.*

The next eight weeks is going to be like a really good Tapas meal – which is a sharing menu with lots of little plates for everyone to try. You may not like all the dishes, but there is something there for everyone. And even the ones you don't think you'll like by the looks of them, you're meant to try them anyway.

And halfway through our year-long theme of *A Place at the Table* it's about time we started feasting! And we begin, as any good meal should, with *really good* wine.

The changing of water to wine at the Wedding at Cana is Jesus' first public act in John, it's the first "sign" of God's presence in the world through him. It is not a miracle that heals the sick or raises the dead, but rather keeps a party going for family and friends. It is a sign of celebration, an affirmation of abundance, an invitation for us to not let any situation or circumstance keep us from living Fully Alive. It's permission for us to kick up our feet from time to time and relax and let loose and rest and rejuvenate.

And as if that is not enough good news, the four words that begin this passage bring us even better news: "*On the third day.*"

Already John wants us to think of Jesus' resurrection as we begin reading this passage. There are all these foreshadowings that are meant to serve as foretastes of what is to come – as if John is preparing our palate, even now, for crucifixion and resurrection...the ultimate reversal where Life not only precedes Death but Life follows Death too.

What are these foretastes? First, Jesus mentions that "his hour has not yet come," which in John's gospel, always refers to the hour of Jesus' death. And then, as Jesus keeps the life of the party going with six jugs of wine, we are to remember that the wine he serves at this wedding is far superior to the sour wine that will be held to Jesus' lips as he hangs on a cross, thirsty and dying. This parallel points to the truth that celebration and sacrifice are not mutually exclusive. As Christ pours out his life in love for us as he dies with a paltry sponge of sour wine on his lips, we are to remember how he filled our cups with sweet wine in abundance, teaching us how to live.

And third, Jesus speaks to his mother, calling her 'Woman,' – a term that he actually uses

throughout John’s gospel for many of the women he speaks with – “*Woman, believe me, the hour is coming...*” he says to the Woman at the well and “*Woman, why are you weeping?*” he asks of Mary Magdalene at the tomb.⁵

And, in chapter 2, John is setting the table for the *only other time* in John’s gospel when Jesus speaks to his mother – which is, of course, when he’s dying on the cross and says to her, “*Woman, behold your son...*” and to John, “*Behold your mother.*” In this exchange Jesus is telling his mother and his beloved disciple to create a new family – one not knit together by birth but by discipleship, following in his love and life, and caring for each other in community. It’s quite fitting to have this familial reference, since the first sign in John’s gospel happens at a family wedding in a small town, and involves his own family member – his mother, Mary.

And Mary’s promptings are the inspiration and reason for the first ‘sign’ that revealed that God’s glory in Jesus is rooted in joy and abundance and

hospitality – all to help a family in need as they host a party. AND Jesus’ mom, along with the beloved disciple, are the first two people Jesus charges with being a new family of faith together after his death. You see, Mary bookends Jesus’ earthly ministry in John’s gospel in a powerful way.⁶ From celebration to sorrow, graciousness to grief...holding out the empty vessels at the wedding (which Jesus fills with wine) to holding out her arms as her son dies (which Jesus fills with the embrace of John – who holds her as she holds him.

Jesus fills our emptiness at weddings and funerals, at times of celebration and sorrow. There is no moment in which Jesus does not invite us to be fully alive to it – to what is happening directly before us or in our experience. There is no moment in which Jesus does not want to meet the need that we have...even if it’s in a way far different than we imagined...which it most likely will be.

If we hold out our emptiness, Jesus will fill it. It’s what he does. It’s who he is.

⁵ Rolf Jacobson, Craig Koester, & Kathryn Schifferdecker, “NL Podcast 477: Wedding at Cana - Jan. 9, 2022,” *Working Preacher* (3 Jan. 2022), accessed on Jan. 9, 2022 at

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/477-wedding-at-cana-jan-9-2022>.

⁶ Jacobson, Koester, & Schifferdecker, *ibid.*

Already, we are seeing the brilliance in John's gospel: every dish we will taste over the next eight weeks will nourish us for our daily lives, *and* will remind us of the kin-dom of God, the heavenly banquet, that is to come. Jesus' ministry on earth reveals not only the glory of God, but the power of God that is still alive and at work in our lives and in the world through the Spirit of Christ that lives in you and in me.

And that power begins with the gift of abundance that Jesus serves up in...wine. Excuse me, *really good* wine. I love how this detail is included. The people say, "*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.*" The way it's phrased it's almost as if Jesus has hidden this good wine away until now, like how you might hide your best whiskey at the back of your liquor cabinet so that other people don't drink it before you can. But that can't be the case because remember – this wedding is at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. He's not hiding anything! He's breaking out the good stuff right at the beginning! He's not keeping the blessings of life abundant

tucked away until after he dies or until after we die...he's making them available to us here and now.

And sure, Jesus is serving up really good wine at this wedding, but the bigger thing he's serving up is dignity and hospitality. He's preventing a whole household from feeling shame – which is a miracle, in and of itself. Once we feel shame, it's hard to shake. In Jesus' day, to run out of wine at a wedding reception (which lasted for days, not hours) – it would either mean you were poor or you hadn't planned properly. And Cana was a small town. People talk. And people would've remembered The Wedding That Had Run Out Of Wine (gasp). So when Mary tells Jesus "*they have no wine*" she is not gossiping or complaining. She knows the heart of her son and she knows he wouldn't want this family to feel shame or embarrassment or disgrace.

Which means that as Jesus serves up abundance and joy at this wedding, he's simultaneously shutting down (or shoving away) shame and disgrace. When Jesus serves up something good in our life – it almost always helps us to push

away something that we're holding onto that hasn't been serving us. Longing for authentic relationships? To realize yourself beloved in the eyes of Christ is to also begin to recognize the relationships that don't honor that belovedness. Feeling anxious and worried about the future? Resting in the presence of Jesus, tuning your attention to the beauty of God's creation, take a moment to breathe in a small gratitude – all these things remind you that no matter what the future holds, right here and right now – God is with you. You can worry about the wine running out in your life, or you can trust that even when you are completely running on empty – Jesus will fill you up...with something as simple as a sign, perhaps a phone call or text from a friend when you need it the most.

You see, this story reminds us that we cannot meet our own needs all the time; we must recognize our own limitations and let God – and good friends – step in and help us.

Life is really hard right now. At least, it feels that way to me. It's not easy to preach a sermon about joy and celebration and abundance on the first Sunday that we went back to virtual

worship because of COVID again. The pews are empty, which might just be symbolic of some of our hearts. We're all looking around at the celebration that we think is supposed to be Our Life and saying, "the wine has run out."

Well, sometimes it helps just to say that. The Wine Has Run Out. Sometimes we need to tell our friends or family members or therapists or pastors this. If you are feeling this way and haven't told someone, I encourage you to do so. Because in saying it out loud, maybe you'll be able to admit it to yourself and to God too. Name the truth that the "wine has run out in your life" – because only then can true abundance come. Only then will others know the need that we have so that they can try to help us meet it, as Mary and Jesus did. But also – if we don't name it – if we just pretend the wine hasn't run out – then we'll just sit around with empty cups getting thirstier and thirstier and wonder why no one can see our parched throats. Or worse, we'll go around trying to fill our cups with water that we tell ourselves is wine – but who are we fooling? Only ourselves.

Here's the beauty of this passage: it's not an unrelatable

miracle (as many often are); it's fairly ordinary. You see, Jesus' first sign in John's gospel – the first revelation of God's glory – is about allowing a family and a whole host of guests find celebration again when they thought they were in crisis, to find abundance when all they saw was scarcity. The reality of whatever caused them to run out of wine is still true. Their circumstances haven't changed, *per se*. What changed is that their thirst, their need was made known to Jesus and they trusted Jesus to meet their need (and it took some trust – because his instructions to the servants about filling ritual purification jars with water made no sense!) Jesus didn't fix their problems forever – it's not like he ran some kind of “Starbucks for Life: promo; he didn't create a magic spicket that would pour out good wine forever. He simply:

- took something they had in their midst – stone jars –
- and filled it with something they did have enough of – water –
- and then somehow through his presence, it became what they needed – wine.

Sometimes the miracles we need are in our midst. But we can't create them on our own. When

we are feeling empty, when all we can see is what we don't have instead of what we do, perhaps we invite others to look around with us, and maybe our looking together gives us eyes of abundance. What stone jars – what objects that you've only thought of as being able to be used for one thing – do you have? How could they be used differently? What ordinary thing – like water – do you have plenty of? And what people around you can help? As you start to take inventory of these gifts, you may discover abundance, and experience joy.

Jesus does not want us to live in perpetual crisis. He wants us to celebrate, to find abundance and joy in our day to day lives. Eight chapters later, he'll say, *“I have come that you may have life, and have it in abundance.”* (John 10:10b).

Jesus wants us to drink the good wine, all the time – and he provides it for us from the beginning! Not because he wants us to get drunk, but because every moment of our life – from celebrations like weddings to sorrows like death – is worth being fully present for. There is joy and abundance in having our needs met...and in meeting the needs of others, and

sometimes in just being able to name our need or our emptiness.

What Jesus serves up at this wedding is an invitation for all of us, no matter what situation we find ourselves in, to fill our cups with Life. We only have this life, this day, this moment, this breath. And while this life, this day, this moment, this breath might be excruciatingly painful, Jesus doesn't want it to be shameful. Jesus did not come to take away our suffering; he suffers along with us. But he did come to take away our guilt and shame and all the "shoulda, woulda, couldas" and all the "what ifs and if onlys"...all those thoughts that can keep us spiraling and focusing on what has run out in our life (and how we have come up lacking), instead of on what is flowing in our life, on what the abundance that is around us already.

And it's fitting that this moment of abundance and joy – this miracle of turning water into wine – happened at a wedding. Because indeed, Jesus came to wed us to God. That is, to bring together (to wed) *our longings* with *God's love*. Word Made Flesh – Dwelling Among Us. It's that connection, that knowledge of how we are loved and known and seen by God –

that is truly "the good wine" – the presence of Jesus himself. The love of God outpoured into the vessels of our lives.

I'm convinced that Jesus serves up Joy and Abundance in our life and that it comes in ordinary moments and through ordinary people and through the extraordinary love and grace of God. I need help seeing this...and sometimes I need help dishing it on my plate. Maybe you do too. Of all the dishes that we need to take seconds and thirds of, I'd say Joy and Abundance is it.

And if your life situation is such that it feels impossible to drink "good wine all the time" – remember that wine is best savored in sips, not gulps. What can you sip on today that will help you live more fully tomorrow?

Amen.