

In our Gospel lesson this morning we find ourselves at a wedding. Which seems strangely fitting. I can't imagine why. Just before John lets us crash this wedding to witness what is to transpire, we are introduced to the Disciples, who now join Jesus as guests at this wedding. While John has already told us who the Christ is, it is here that we are introduced to Jesus, and His glory revealed, at this most unlikely event, a wedding in the small forgettable town of Cana. This is where we meet the Word made flesh not as a prophet crying out in the distance, or as a hermit speaking only to the birds, or as a recluse, someone far off from the experience of human life, human joy. We find Him in the midst of social gatherings, of love and delight, we find Him attending a wedding in this rural community. But unlike most weddings, it is not the bride or the groom who stand at the center of this occasion, we do not even know their names, in fact the groom is only mentioned so he could be scolded for being a poor host. Is this what I have to look forward to? The married couple are not in the spotlight this day. At this wedding the center of attention falls on a few guests. On a widowed woman, her son and His Disciples.

This wedding event which seems so strange is for John the beginning of Jesus' ministry. This is the moment that the Word of God begins speaking to the world. At this wedding, this intimate gathering of friends and family, not in the Temple or a grandiose entrance into ministry, the glory of God begins to be revealed. For John this is the first sign of Jesus' glory, the beginning of His self-revelation, here in this humble wedding. This seems like a strange scene to begin public ministry, at a wedding that has run out of wine. At a wedding where the booze and the joy have both run dry. This does not seem like the suffering that Jesus was meant to comfort, and it does not seem like the glory of God revealed. Why start here John? Why not somewhere else, anywhere else? Why keep this story at all, there must have been plenty of other stories that got left out?

But this is where John has led us, so I guess we must go. When we enter the scene the wine has run out, which is the biggest sin of any wedding reception. The guests are sure to notice and make their displeasure known, especially one in particular. It is at this point that Mary comes to Jesus to tell Him that there is no wine, in case he hadn't noticed. It is unclear what Mary even expects Jesus to do about this, does she know that Jesus can turn water into wine? Does she just expect Jesus to find more wine? This is a strange scene indeed, I picture Mary not so subtlety elbowing Jesus. Letting Him know something that was not a secret. What makes the scene even stranger is that Jesus rebukes his mother, asking what that has to do with Him and telling her that His hour has not yet come. As we read this we cannot help but imagine His words as equating to "butt out Mom" or something even more biting. His tone comes off as adversarial, and rude even. Yelling at your Mom is not exactly a great start to ministry. But maybe there is more to what Jesus is saying here. I sure hope so at least, there has to be. The phrasing that Jesus uses are not isolated just to this moment, we hear the same words "what have you to do with us, Son of God" coming again and again from the demon possessed. And we know how Jesus responds to them.

What if instead of telling an over bearing mother to butt out, what if Jesus is asking His mother, what do the problems of a wedding, the problems of the world, of these small rural people have to do with me? The answer that we know, the answer that maybe Mary knew, which would explain her subsequent response to the servants, is that Jesus has everything to do with these problems. The Word made flesh who lives among us has everything to do with the problems of the small, He has everything to do with our empty jars of wine, He has come to fill them all, to fill our lives with His presence. That is the whole purpose of His coming into the world, the whole purpose of His coming to this wedding, because He has everything to do with

these small moments. He is not rebuking His mother, He is announcing His glory. Jesus is not being thrown into action by the intercession of His mother but repeating His own purpose.

These are the small moments that we find Jesus entering into, the empty spaces of life which seem so insignificant. It is these very small moments that Jesus comes into, leading to His hour which has not yet come, His crucifixion. His glorifying-humiliating moment on the cross is the lens through which we understand all of these baffling words and works of Jesus. Otherwise we are only left confused, of course the hour has not yet come, but in that hour all of these small moments find meaning. They all find a purpose larger than what seems to be. All of the stories, in all of their bizarre movements, find their meaning in the final glory, including this opening revelation of God's glory, in this small moment, for which Jesus has come. This is not the hour of glorification, but in the cross, the hour of final glorification all these other moments where Jesus enters into, revealing Himself, find their full meaning.

This is the only way that what follows makes any sense at all. Otherwise we are left with a God who snaps at His mother, and the Word of God which is not understood. Otherwise Mary's command to the servants makes no sense, and Jesus is thrust into ministry because His mother told Him to. Which would certainly be problematic indeed. No we must understand Jesus' words in light of His revelation as the Word made flesh, and the one ever moving towards the cross. This is what makes this not just a lackluster wedding, but the revelation of God, this is why John hands this story down to us. This is why Mary tells the servants to do as Jesus says, it is His Word, the Word, which brought the world into existence and His word which springs the servants into action. It is His Word which creates, restores and purifies. This is the God who tells the servants to fill up the stone jars.

But what does this have to do with us, with our Church life today? Unless you hire Jesus as a wedding planner, does this story have anything to do with us? At first glance it doesn't seem so, it seems disconnected from us who are separated by so much time and space. But the answer that this story is giving, is a resounding yes. This story, the God we find in it, has everything to do with us, just as Jesus had everything to do with the wine. Even though your jars for purification may sit empty, and your times of joy may have dried up, that is not the final word. Even though our congregation may have more empty seats than it ever had before, even though we may look around and wonder what the future holds when our joy seems to have run dry, this is not the final word. Our wedding joy, has not turned into a funeral dirge.

I know that the numbers in our congregation are not what they once were, I know that we can look to the past and remember how full our Sunday school was, how full our jars were. And I know that many look to the staggering biblical illiteracy numbers and wonder where we can possibly go from here. I know we can look around at the state of the mainline congregations and see them as hollow shells of what they once were. I know that there are many who predict the downfall of mainline denominations, and the Church in general. I even know some older ministers who think that they will bury the Church that seemed so alive. They mourn over empty jars, remnants of religious life that have been abandoned and forgotten. Many of you are old enough to remember times when every congregation was more robust than the last, but for me and people younger than me, we have only ever seen the empty jars. For many of us too young to remember the glory days of the past we see only the vestiges that stand as grim reminders. We come wondering if the wine has run out, and our joyous occasion has turned towards the large stone jars that stand empty.

But what happens next is what is truly miraculous and glorious. Yes turning water into wine is not something that happens every day, but we would not describe it as glorious. What is miraculous, what is glorious, what is a sign of who Jesus is, is the filling up what was empty, the old jars meant for ritual purification, being transformed into the good wine, the wine which brings joy, the wine which finds meaning in the blood of Christ. It is this wine, which brings joy, this blood which brings love. This is what John wants us to understand, not that Jesus is able to perform magic, or is able to keep the bar open at a wedding but that Jesus is able to fill our emptiness with His grace, with His purifying blood which is shed in His final glory, which begins our never ending Easter celebration. And it is beginning here, with a simple and small moment. This is who Jesus reveals Himself to be, this is why the Disciples suddenly believe in Him. Not because He makes the best wine but because He reveals Himself to be the one who comes to those who are empty, those who are beaten down and hopeless and gives them life, who brings them joy that is sweeter than they could imagine.

I know that looking at the state of the Church, even our own congregation could bring us to despair, or even make us fatalistic but it is into these empty jars, you and me, this congregation that Jesus is filling with good wine of incredible joy, and true purification. We are the empty jars which seem ready to topple over, to be forgotten and abandoned that Jesus is prepared to pour all of Himself into. For our sake God did not keep silent, for our sake God let our salvation shine forth. By the mouth of the Lord we are no longer empty jars, but have been given a name, we are the Church, the people whose God's Word has created. No longer shall you be called forsaken. This is what we believe, this is our God as He has revealed Himself, let us celebrate with the joy we have been given.