

Abundance

Epiphany 2C—January 20, 2019

[This transcript was meant for a spoken performance. It is not optimized for a reading experience.]

When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” 4And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?”

—Gospel of Luke

Will you pray with me?

Holy loving God. You created us in your image and laughed. Be present with us, listen up and may my words once again make you laugh. May your great comfort flood over us now, now and now. Amen. May this be so.

If we approach the divine that we meet in Jesus as only divine, we miss the humanity. If we see only the humanity, we miss the divinity. In missing the divinity and in missing the humanity, we miss the deeper truths.

All of us, almost all of us have experienced weddings. If we haven't been to a wedding, we at least have been to a party, a gathering, a celebration. If you haven't done any of those things... what on Earth is going on with you? Where are you celebrating with others?

Today's story is about a celebration. We are back into the late first century Gospel of John. The storyteller we call John is using a celebration, a wedding as the background of his story.

Some of you might have heard discussion about this story.

There is some discussion about the wedding of Cana and that this wedding was just no ordinary wedding. This was Jesus's wedding. The wedding at Cana is the wedding of Jesus and???????

At one level, there is truth to this hypothesis. Jesus is described in our sacred writings as Teacher. At his grave, Mary of Magdela calls Jesus “Rabboni”—teacher.

Following the Jewish tradition of teachers, Jesus would have to have been married. That was the custom. That was the expectation. All teachers were married.

Other evidence, circumstantial or not, is the fact that the story presents the mother of Jesus saying, “They are out of wine”. Why a guest would be worrying (or even knowing) that the wine was low or empty is a curiosity. That was the role of the host, the host being the groom's family.

Are you connecting the dots?

Others point out that, at the end, the scripture says:

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.

Thinking along this line, Jesus is the bridegroom.

It makes for fascinating and deep thinking.

Was there a conspiracy to cover up another truth about this wedding celebration? That is possible. Extremely possible... hold on to that idea.

When I talk about the canons of the Bible, (the canon being a list of books and specifically the New Testament as we know it) if you are thinking that the community of John, from which today's Gospel originates, was sitting around in church reading from their Oxford leather-bound Bible, you would be horribly off-track.

The books of the Bible were far more fluid from community to community. It depended greatly on the ethos of those who made up the community and what that community valued most.

As I alluded to last week, by the fourth century the canon was beginning to firm up. The canon was being created. Under Emperor Constantine, the council of Nicaea, people were told what texts they were permitted to read... if you read. Who read? Monastic and religious leaders.

Why were they told to read what they were to read? Go back to last week's sermon and the council of Nicaea... control. Whoever held the power held the control. Whoever had control had the ability to shape and direct in which direction the church was going to flow. Whoever held control also had the ability to wipe out unwanted competition, called the heretics.

We know now that sometime in those years after Nicaea, a canon was set... it was set by ordering all other Gospels and books to be destroyed. Precocious monastic libraries were destroyed. All that was left was Matthew, Mark, Luke and John... I am not dealing with the letters.

That is all that was left. Well, that was *supposed* to be all that was left.

It turns out that some monks must have been overly distraught or had great vision and they took their banned and forbidden books, stored them into clay urns and buried them. That is where they stayed untouched until the '40s—the 1940s—when they were unearthed at Nag Hammadi. These are known as the lost Gospels.

There is the Gospel of Thomas. You might have heard of that.

There is the Gospel of Mary. That takes a little rethinking and inclusion.

Have you read the Gospel of Judas? That now becomes mind-boggling.

Throughout these lost texts, something is revealed about the position of women around Jesus and, in particular, the woman Miriam, commonly called Mary from Magdela.

So let's go back to today's Gospel. Was this Jesus's wedding? Possibly. Was he intimate with Mary of Magdela, did he marry her, under Jewish tradition most likely, possibly? If not her, someone else?

Did he have children? Unless one or both were sterile, then possibly.

You can begin to see the quandary that the early Christian fathers had. What would they leave, in what would they leave out? What was important? What was not important?

Was there a conspiracy to cover up another truth about this wedding celebration? That is possible. Extremely possible, if this was a biography.

If we were writing a column for the New York Times on their social page, these facts would be of extreme interest, but let me say it again and again:

The Gospel stories—all sacred text—is sacred text and not biography. All sacred text (and I am not just talking about ours) is trying to enlighten you.

Sacred text tries to tap into you so that something might be revealed. What is the revelation for you today? What epiphany, what light shines for you in this text?

The party is running out of wine. Wine is important in the Middle East. Go to the Middle East, go to the Mediterranean—wine is plentiful. Everyone drinks wine, even the baby gets some. Go to Paris: wine is far cheaper than, say, a bottle of Coke.

In today's Gospel, the party is about to go dry and Jesus performs a miracle. When you hear that Jesus performs a miracle, it means you have to get on your scuba gear and "dive deeper, darlings. dive deeper".

The servants go to the humungous urns of water that are used for cleansing—ritual, sacred cleansing in the Jewish tradition. Water is out... wine is in. Water is changed into wine.

That is one level:

The old water,
the old ritual of cleansing,
is out.
The new wine
satisfies,
cleanses,
brings together.

The wine image echoes the reference of this Jesus being the new wine, the new order, the new way.

It isn't just one urn that is changed... but all of them. How many people were at this party? No matter how many: that is a lot—a lot of wine. There would be abundance enough for everyone... bingo.

There would be abundance, enough for everyone.

This is the part that I have been meditating with this week.

God wishes you and I abundance—enough. Enough, not just for you and for me, but for everyone.

Are you living an abundant life? Are you living with enough? How many of you just went into the thought, “Yes, I have enough, but I want... ‘dot, dot dot’”?

We live in a culture of “I want”. We live in a culture of hoarding. You don’t have to end up on TV with your stuff piled up to your ceiling.

You have enough.

“But I want...”

You have enough.

“BUT I WANT...”

You have enough.

This is where our feet hit the pavement. This is the challenge. This is the shadow side of abundance; this is the disowned part.

If you are going to walk this sacred path of Christianity—if you are going to walk any sacred path—you are going to face this truth.

You have enough.

You have enough.

“But I deserve.”

Who told you that you deserve?

“I want, I deserve”— there is the shadow side of the journey.

Know that when you say “I deserve”, you are headed into trouble.

“I worked hard today... I deserve a pie today.”

“I work hard... I deserve more money...” You steal money from the company, from your clients.

“I work hard. I deserve to play hard...” You have an extra drink, another line, a couple more joints, another pie.

“I work hard, I deserve the best...” You buy a Hummer, a big-screen TV.

There is no sacred path that will ever tell you that you deserve something. The message is that there is enough. There is enough, abundantly enough, for everyone.

Maybe we can learn. Maybe, on this small blue spinning planet, we can all learn that there is enough for everyone. If we learn that enough is enough, then others can also have enough.

This is the party you have been called to.

This is the celebration that the Divine has arranged for you... for you... for you, for all of us.

The time is now. It is time for us to be the good wine. It is time for us to serve the good wine. Don't let this party end. Literally: don't let this party end. We are in trouble, globally this Earth, we are in trouble, serious trouble.

Don't let this end. Live abundant lives, share abundance, help others live abundantly. Help your planet to live abundantly. Care for, celebrate, enjoy... because this is good news indeed.