

2 Epiphany
January 19, 2025

Sermon by Rev. Steve Seibert

The groom stood at the altar in the small chapel. The wedding was about to begin. Much preparation had gone into this day: bride's wedding dress and groom's suit picked out; flowers arranged; music carefully chosen; food prepared; wine, beer and champagne at the ready. With the support of family and friends, all the details had been covered. About 25 minutes earlier, the groom had run his hand over his face and realized that he had forgotten to shave. He considered running to the store but knew there wasn't time. Oh well, a small detail that wouldn't be noticed by many, he thought. The bridal party had gathered at the back of the chapel. The priest nodded to the church musician. She started playing. **It was not the music the bride and the groom had chosen!** The groom knew he had to act quickly to correct this mistake. He looked at the musician, ready to say... What would he say? It had to be now! The groom said...**nothing**. He did not embarrass the musician. He did not embarrass himself. The wedding was lovely; the reception was full of joy and celebration.

Leila and I have wonderful memories of that day.

Everybody wants their wedding to go as planned, with the bride, groom, family and friends remembering how beautiful the celebration was. It was no different in first century Palestine. A wedding would have taken place after a betrothal of a year, usually in the fall, after the harvest. The celebration lasted from three to seven days.

Among the guests are Mary (John calls her the mother of Jesus), Jesus and some of the first disciples. Mary is most likely a widow in her mid-40's. She could be remembering her own wedding, some 30 years ago; perhaps she is thinking of Joseph. She may have been related to the bride or groom. She is aware of the shortage of wine, and does not want the family to be humiliated. Running out of wine would be disastrous.

We have all heard this story of the wedding at Cana dozens of times. Even many of our brothers and sisters who are not Christian are aware of the water made wine by Jesus at the Wedding in Cana. But there is feeling to this story, Frederick Buechner describes it as being dreamlike, that seems to operate below our conscious awareness. Indeed, even so for the people in this narrative.

When the wine gave out... We don't hear of the chief steward, also translated as the *director of the entertainment*, panicking. Yet he is the one charged with making sure everyone is having a good time. Mary simply quietly goes to Jesus and tells him **They have no wine.**

What has happened in the thirty years they have lived together for Mary to report this to her son with the expectation that he can do something about it? She knows she has given birth and then raised this holy child who is God's son, but again, what does that have to do with a wine shortage? I'm going to go out on a limb here and say I don't believe that Jesus made food or wine miraculously appear on their table at home. So what is going on here between mother and son?

In the Message bible, Jesus responds saying **Is that any of our business, Mother – yours or mine? This isn't my time. Don't push me.** Jesus clearly states that he is not going to do anything about this shortage of wine. At least not now. As we read between the lines, Jesus does not tell Mary that he cannot do anything about the shortage of wine. But clearly he's not going to do anything until it's his time. And he is clear that this is not his time.

The dreamlike aspect of this narrative continues. Mary not only ignores Jesus' refusal to act, she now involves the servants, commanding them to **Do whatever he tells you.** What do they have to do with all of this? Furthermore, who is this woman, not the master of the banquet, not the mother of the groom or bride, that is now giving orders? And does she, at some sub-conscious level, know what her son will do? Otherwise, why does she involve the servants?

There is no mention of Jesus sighing or rolling his eyes. He's just called some disciple to join him in the last two days. He doesn't seem to be worried about appearing to be weak in their eyes. No. Jesus, son of God, obeys his mother.

Fill the jars with water Jesus says. Six stone jars, 20-30 gallons each, perhaps with some water already in them. Still...we are told the servants fill them to the brim. How far did the servants have to travel to get the water? How many trips? If the stone jars were half full, that's still 75 gallons weighing over 600 pounds. And remember, they don't know WHY one of the guests, at the behest of his mother, has told them to fill ALL the stone jars with water. Nonetheless, they do what Jesus tells them to do. Fair to say that in this narrative, the servants do the heavy lifting.

We know the rest of the story. Without another word, without a gesture, Jesus tells them to take some of the water to the chief steward. Voila'. The wine from the stone jars is amazing!

Putting it in everyday measure for us, Jesus has provided the equivalent of 600 to 900 bottles of wine so that the wedding feast can go on. Spectacular! But this narrative is not about the wine. Or maybe in some way it is, but if we stop there, we miss so much more.

This gathering, this wedding feast, is about the joining of two lives, two spirits, into unity. That is why family and friends have been invited to this wedding feast at Cana. It is why Mary, Jesus, and the first-called disciples were invited. There are toasts to the bride and the groom, there may be have been speeches, and then there is the celebration of lives shared that is woven into

this feast. This celebration lasted from three to seven days. Stories are told, memories stirred, couples remember their weddings and renew their love. Children learn what being part of a family larger means. A wedding may happen between two, but it is an act in which the gathered community participates.

Among us here today, we have brothers and sisters who travel a difficult but heroic journey to living a life of sobriety. And so, in all fairness, they might be thinking and could say to me, Steve, all this wine does not feel like something good to me. I am on daily journey of sobriety. What can this narrative mean for me?

This story is about the extravagant love of God showered upon us without measure. In some ways, the wine is a metaphor. This story is that when we gather to celebrate a wedding, whether it's a man and a woman, a man and a man, or a woman and a woman, Jesus says to us **This is holy as you celebrate each other and commit your lives to each other.** Frederick Buechner writes *The love that is affirmed at a Christian wedding is not just a condition of the heart but an act of the will, and the promise that love makes is to will the other's good even at the expense sometimes of its own good – and that is quite a promise.*

How could Jesus not be woven into that?

Is it only at a wedding that such sacred things happen? Of course not! As we gather together as families, the love of Jesus flows. As we gather as a community, the love of Jesus flows. As we gather for a meal in a home such as has been organized by The Parish Enrichment Team, the love of Jesus flows. As we recognize the holy in each other – and in ourselves – and thank God for that, the love of Jesus flows.

Perhaps the miracle at Cana is that Mary was bold enough to challenge her son even when said no, that Jesus listened to his mother even when it didn't match his plans, that the servants did the part they were asked to do, difficult as it was, so that the wine *could* flow freely. Beyond that yet within that, the extravagant and boundless love of God flowed that day, flows this day, and flows for eternity.

Amen.

