**Miraculous Joy**A sermon by

Dewey Williams
Central Prison – General Population, Raleigh, NC

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*On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3When 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? My hour has not yet come.’ 5His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ 6Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7Jesus said to them, ‘Fill the jars with water.’ And they filled them up to the brim. 8He said to them, ‘Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.’ So they took it. 9When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10and 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.’ 11Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*(John 2:1-11 NRSV)

Introduction:
The story of the miracle at the wedding in Cana has to do with a shortage of wine and how

Mary, Jesus, and his disciples intervened to bring about provisions when the wine shortage occurred. As I look around the terrain of our current society there are other forms of shortages that we face in 2017. As I witness people plot courses day by day in their lives they are faced with shortages. There are financial shortages as people try to make ends meet so they can have some meat ends. There are shortages of communications where one side does not hear or understand what the other side is saying or feeling. There are shortages of truth and trust; of respect and reliability; of patience and peace; shortages of love and loyalty.

At the same time, it seems that frequently we have surpluses of things that we do not need. We do not have a shortage of political extremism, but we seem to be short of political compassion. We do not have a shortage of guns and bullets, but we have shortage of common sense regarding

reducing gun violence. We do not have a shortage of prisons and prisoners, but we do have a shortage of unbiased criminal justice. We do not have a shortage of voices spouting racial and religious vitriol, but we do have a shortage of voices remembering that we all bring ethnicity, nationality, and faith backgrounds into the melting pot called the United States. The question is, how does the scripture on the wedding in Cana, 2000 years ago, speak to our current situation? This is a legitimate question. More relevantly, how does the wedding in Cana speak to the shortages that men in prison face as you navigate life’s challenges from day to day behind these thick walls and bars?

In our text, marriage and the occasion of a wedding are the canvas upon which the gospel portrait is sketch and the miracle of Jesus turning water to wine is performed. It is at a marriage function that an unanticipated shortage occurred. The wine ran out. Certainly, this may have created shame for the families, or shame for the wedding planner, or shame for the wine supplier. Or perhaps shame for all of them. The purpose of the wedding was to have a grand and glorious celebration of two souls and two families now merged in holy matrimony. The wine was the beverage of the occasion and represented the fullness of the couple’s joy with one another and the magnitude of joy that the community had for the couple. If you were hosting a wedding, you would not want the wine to run out before the guest went home because the wine was a symbol of the joy being shared.

Often in scripture and in literature wine is symbolic of the fullness of life. When you have wine you not only have what you need you have what you want. It is with the understanding that wine represents what we long for that the miracle at Cana can be drawn into the discussion of our passions and what our wants and needs are. The wedding party needed wine to complete their celebration, and you today, as one who is striving to find your fulfillment in life through your incarceration need the assurance that joy brings for your future. The wedding then needed wine, and you now need to see beyond the circumference of your present situation. The wedding party needed wine to represent all that was needed for a marriage to make it at that time, and we all desire that same sense of fulfillment.

Like the wedding planners found themselves short of what they wanted, we all from time to time find ourselves not having what we want in life. You don’t have the freedom you want or the work assignment you want. You don’t have the communication with family you desire to possess. When you don’t have what you want you are vulnerable to ideas and words that draw you toward despair. You will start to speak to yourself saying you are inadequate or inferior; that you are by birth or upbringing less of a person than what is needed. Worse yet is to hear that from someone else. Being Christian men in prison should be a space where encouragement flows back and forth between residents as you all can struggle with the senses of inadequacy or shortages.

Can you imagine Mary saying, “If they ran their weddings the way that I run my weddings they would have plenty of wine?” How arrogant that would have been. When Mary told Jesus the wedding party had run out of wine Jesus said, “What concern is that of ours?” Some have suggested that Jesus’ initial response, “what concern is that to you and to me?” is Jesus looking for a way out of helping someone. But Jesus was not looking for a way out, he was stating that this was someone else’s problem and that he was a guest, or he was an outsider. But being an outsider did not prevent Jesus from coming to the aid of this wedding party. Jesus did not walk away and say, “my name ain’t Bennet and I ain’t in it.” What was the wedding’s problem was embraced by Jesus’ mother and soon became the concern of Jesus. As you walk alongside other men incarcerated you must be aware of the shortages that others are struggling with and be willing to aid them in their moments of lack.

Jesus tells Mary an interesting truth when he says that his hour has not yet come – Jesus was telling his mother that his time of glorification was yet to arrive. What Jesus knew was that God’s activities happen in God’s timeframe and at the very moment when God wants those activities to happen.

Martin Luther King, Jr. preached a sermon about wine once and proclaimed this truth.

*“There is nothing more powerful in all the world than an idea whose time has come. When that idea comes, you can’t stop it. You can use resistance, you can use every other method, but you can’t stop it”* (MLK, Jr. New Wine in Old Bottles)

Jesus knew that there was a connection between the wine shortage and the miracle that was about to occur. Jesus knew then what you need to know now: That there is a connection between your:

* Failures and your future
* Dilemma and your destiny
* Sorrow and your success
* Test and your testimony

Mary tells the servants to do whatever Jesus tells you to do – This is the mindset and behavior pattern to take when your shortages leave you with lack: Not what feels good; Not what you have figured out; Not what others are doing; But do whatever Jesus tells you to do!

Jesus tells “them” to fill the water jars with water. There were six huge stone jars, and each jar was approximately capable of holding about 25 gallons of water. It was unusual for six stone containers of this size to be in one place. They fill the jars to the brim with water. This was a miracle in and of itself because that was a lot of water.

The gospel’s attention to details is noteworthy: the number of jars, the material of the jars, size

of the jars, and them being filled to the brim was a biblical literary technique to show the extravagance of the miracle that was about to take place. God was getting ready to do something big. We serve a God who does big things! We serve a God with a superabundance of benevolence through Jesus Christ. When the details in your life seem overwhelming - lookout - God is getting you ready to do something big.

Mary, Jesus, and his disciples were simply guests at this wedding, and Mary felt a need to get involved. There are some people here in this room that perform just like Mary did at that wedding celebration. When someone is hurting you act. When someone is down you try to lift him or her up; when someone is left out you want to include him or her. Someone in this room cares just like Mary cared. That is what we see in Mary here. It was not her wedding. It was not her child’s wedding. She was in the situation the same way that each of you has found yourselves here in this situation. When Mary could not fix the situation, she went to Jesus. When you can’t fix the problems, you need to go to Jesus.

The scripture says Jesus instructed them (I believe them is Jesus’ disciples) to fill some water containers with water, they followed his instructions and then Jesus told them to draw some out and take it to the high-ranking official attending the wedding, and when the official tasted this wine, he was so impressed because this wine was better than the wine that was served earlier. The Stewart asked where did this wine come from, or who brought the wine? The Stewart told the bridegroom that usually the best wine is served first.

If we are to get a primary message for our lives from this story, I think it would be that when we face shortages, we need Jesus and his disciples. This story includes the actions of the disciples of Jesus Christ following Christ’s directions. When shortages occur in your life you need the savior, but you also should not forget that you need the Savior’s disciples. Some people act as if they can go it all alone, but God has created us with a need for one another and we are designed with interdependence on one another. As brothers in Christ, we should be there to lend helping hands to one another.

Make it a point to invite Jesus and his disciples into your shortages.

This text is about wine, but it is also about a wedding. This makes me think of my own wedding and marriage. 42 years ago, a young woman stood next to me, and we made a vow to love one another as long as we both shall live. We have been together through good day and through some tough days. I would be mistaken to stand here and tell you that we made it 42 years because we were good people and always got it right; or because we mastered the secret of matrimonial bliss. That we unlocked the secret of how to stay married. That would be misleading.

Twelve years ago, when our oldest daughter died it was a very tough time individually and as a couple. They say statistically, the death of a child is hard on marriages and that many couples split and divorce after this kind of loss. In our marriage we found a shortage in our communication, really a shortage in our hearts. Our marriage was tested with these shortages, but I thank God, in the middle of our shortages we found Jesus and his disciples coming to aid our marriage. Our wine had run out, but the disciples kept pouring water into our marriage, and Jesus turned our water into wine.

The truth is that Jesus takes all of our water and will turn it into wine if we do what he says to do. The truth is that God’s wine is not always what you think it will be. God’s miracle and blessing is not necessarily getting what you can see and what you want.

God’s miracle will show up as JOY**!** – A good feeling in the soul produced by the Holy Spirit. And that JOY will produce another miracle of God’s called PEACE! – When things are unraveling, and others cannot sleep you rest because you serve a God who nether slumbers nor sleeps. While God is up, I might as well get some sleep. I have a miracle called peace!
Joy also produces another miracle God called HOPE! – Hope is expressed in the acronym:

Hold On Pray Expecting. That is, we need to keep holding on; keep praying; keep lifting up your arms expecting Jesus to bring the wine into our lives.