Joy in Shortages

A sermon by

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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:

Today’s sermon is about an intriguing subject – wine. As a child, I grew up in a home that was completely dry. We not only did not serve alcoholic beverages in my family of origin, these beverages were not allowed on the property, and if someone had been drinking alcoholic beverages somewhere else and they came over to our house, they had to leave. My parents were adamant about no alcohol. Not only was there no alcohol, there was no card playing, and no ‘worldly music’ and dancing. Our home was set aside for holy living and the practices that were considered unholy were not allow. I understand their logic. Card playing led to gambling, ‘worldly music’ and dancing led to sexual promiscuity, and drinking led to drunkenness. It wasn’t necessarily the behavior that was sinful, but it was what the behavior potentially led a person to do. My parents were trying to have a home that was free of the consequences that they predicted would come from these precipitating behaviors. As I grew older, I learned that everyone that plays cards does not gamble, and everyone that dances is not promiscuous (at least not the bad dancers), and everyone that drinks alcohol does not get drunk.

But that was the tone and tempo of the house and religious community in which I grew up. Wine was forbidden, even though, as we see in our text, Jesus turned water into wine. This is a place of contention for many religious types who hold out for abstinence. I grew up in a Baptist church that had in its covenant read every month that we would abstain from the sale or purchase of alcoholic beverages. Most churches have taken this out of the covenant as congregants would mumble when they came to this line. This reminds me of the old church joke about a preacher that preached against drinking. Maybe you have heard it before. It goes like this: A preacher, which opposed drinking alcohol, was giving a fiery sermon: "If I had all the beer in the world I'd take it and throw it in the river; and if I had all the wine in the world, I'd take it and throw it in the river! And if I had all the whiskey in the world, I'd take it and throw it into the river." He sat down. The choir leader then stood and said, "All please rise for the singing of Hymn #258: 'We Shall Gather at the River.' "

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 2016. As I witness people plot a course day by day in their lives they are faced with shortages. There are shortages of truth and trust; of respect and reliability; of patience and peace; shortages of love and loyalty.

It seems that sometimes we have surpluses of things that we do not need. We do not have a shortage of political candidates 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, nearly 2000 years ago, speak to our current situation? This is a legitimate question.

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 wedding that an unanticipated shortage occurred. The wine ran out. Certainly this may have created shame for the families, or for the wedding planner, or 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 families now merged in holy matrimony. The wine was the beverage of the occasion and represented the fullness of the couple’s love for one another and the magnitude of joy that the community had for the couple. If you were hosting a wedding, you would want all the people to leave before the wine ran out. To have a wedding and to run out of wine meant that the celebration had to end.

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 need hope for your future. The wedding needed wine, and you 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 is present, and we all desire that same sense of fulfillment.

Like the wedding planners found themselves short of what was needed, we all from time to time find ourselves not having what we want in life. You don’t have the money you want or the job you want. You don’t have the mate you want or the child you long for. You don’t have the education or experience you desire to possess. The last thing you need is someone telling you that you are inadequate or inferior; that you are by birth or upbringing less of a person than someone else. No one deserves to hear that God is against him or her or that God favors someone over him or her or that they are inferior in some capacity.

Can you imagine Mary saying, “they ran out wine because they are cursed? If they ran their weddings the way that I run my weddings they would have plenty of wine.” How arrogant that would have been. 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 else. But Jesus in not looking for a way out, he is stating that this is someone else’s problem and that he is 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.” No, Jesus came to their aid. In like manner, we that are on the outside of someone else’s problem must stretch forth our hands to help those that are on the inside of their problem. Those on the outside does not excuse us from reaching out with a helping hand.

The story unfolds like this:

*  Mary informs her son Jesus that the wine had run out
*  Jesus scoffs at his mother because they are visitors

Jesus tells Mary that his hour has not yet come – Jesus was telling his mother that his time of glorification was yet to come. That is his time of crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension where to come in the future. What Jesus knew was that God’s activities happen in God’s timeframe and at the moment when God wants them to happen.

MLK *“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 also knew what we need to know – That there is a connection between our ultimate glorification and our current ministry.

*  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 tell “them” to fill the water jars with water
*  There were six huge stone jars / Approximately capable of hold about 25 gallons of water each. Unusual for six stone containers of this size to be in one place
*  They fill the jars to the brim with water – a miracle in and of itself.
*  The gospel’s attention to details; the number of jars, the material of the jars, size of the jars, and them being filled to the brim was a 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 blessing through his son, Jesus Christ.
*  Jesus tell them to draw some water out and take it to the Stewart
*  When the Stewart tasted the water it had become wine
*  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.

Mary, Jesus, and his disciples were simply guests at this wedding, and Mary felt a need to get involved. Do you know anyone like that? There are people in Mt. Level that go into action to help others when they need it. When someone is hurting they take action. When someone is down, they try to lift them up; when someone is left out, they want to include them. There are fellow prisoners just like that too. Someone in this room is just like Mary. That is what we see in Mary here. It was not her wedding. It was not her child’s wedding. She was just a guest, but she felt for those that had the responsibility and informed her son, whom she new was a miracle worker.

Jesus instructed them (I believe the 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.

If we are to get a primary message 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 Christ following Christ’s directions. When shortages occur in our life, and they will occur, we need the savior, but we also should not forget that we 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 and sisters to each other 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. 41 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 41 years because we were good and 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.

Eleven 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 of 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 disciple 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 abundance and blessing is not necessarily getting what you can see and what you want.

God’s abundance will show up as JOY! – A good feeling in the soul produced by the Holy Spirit.

God’s abundance will show up as PEACE! – When things are unraveling and others cannot sleep I rest because I serve a God who nether slumbers nor sleeps. While God is up I might as well get some sleep. I have peace!

God’s abundance will show up as HOPE! – Hold On Expecting Praying / Keep holding on; keep praying; Open up your arms expecting Jesus to bring the wine into your life.