

Sunday, September 6, 2020 John 2:1-12

Jesus and the Problem with Wine

We conclude our “At Your Request” summer series today with our focus on Jesus’ first miracle which takes place during a wedding banquet in Cana. The wedding celebration is in full swing and a major problem arises- they have run out of wine. What takes place is a battle of wills with the miracle becoming known by only a few people. And it is this situation where Jesus has a problem about what to do with the problem of wine.

We need to remember what the traditions and customs were around weddings during these times. The couple have been married either the day before or earlier in the day. The wedding is a community celebration and many guests are there. We do not know who was married in Cana just a few days after Jesus’ choosing his disciples but they were all invited. Jesus’ mother, Mary is also a guest but with her being in the know of the wine problem, she is probably closely related to the wedding couple. The feast for the wedding has been put out on the tables. People are celebrating by eating and drinking together.

Mary is helping serve the food and watching the people as they enjoy themselves. She learns of a serious problem and so Mary goes up to Jesus and whispers to him that there is a problem with the wine. They have run out. When Mary says this to Jesus, his response is “What concern is that of you and me? My hour has not yet come!” Mary knows that Jesus can do something, not sure what but is upset by his words to her. She then disappears from the story except to say to the servant, “do what he says!”

How serious was this problem of no wine? At that time the wedding was celebrated for not just one evening and one meal, but over the course of days as people travelled fair distances to be present. And so if there is no more wine, and if this information becomes known to all the guests, it would mean that the party was over and all would go home. This would end the wedding celebration, the families would be embarrassed for months to come and what had been planned as a party for three or more days would end early. Mary has told Jesus and expects him to do something. She knows that he can do a lot of things but Jesus feels it is not yet time. He doesn’t want to draw attention to himself for he thinks it is too soon for him to reveal who he is and what he came to do. After all, he has just gathered his disciples and started teaching them about what they would be doing with him in the next months and years. The disciples are still trying to figure out who Jesus is as well. And then Mary tells Jesus- do something! There is no more wine.

Of course there is no way that they can order it on amazon, or click and collect it, or even go to the winery to buy more. They are in the midst of the celebration and they need wine now before everyone overhears the problem. So what does Jesus do? He looks around to see what is happening around him and what might be possible. He then starts to put a plan together without telling everyone what is happening.

This week will be a week of anxiety, stress and wonder. It will be filled with worried parents of children of all ages, and everyone wondering what will occur as children and youth go back to school or its equivalent. Students will have new routines in how they will learn, socialize, eat lunch and do each day. Parents will learn about safety protocols as the children are in the classroom and then teachers will be sharing how the curriculum will be taught so that all will grow in understanding. There have been many hours of planning and preparation completed by many people and it will all depend upon if the people will support the plan and prevent the spread of covid19 in order to keep everyone safe. There is a plan but it will take time to see how the plan will unfold and what will result.

Jesus plan was actually started by Mary speaking to the servants. She told them to do whatever he said for them to do. Hearing this, many of the servants would not have any reason to question this. But why should they listen to Mary or this man who seems indifferent about there being no wine. Jesus looks again and he sees very 6 large water jars. These were used by the guests to purify themselves before the feast began and as needed throughout the gathering. Water was a luxury item and for a host to have 6 huge vessels each holding 20-30 gallons was indeed a great expense. But Jesus sees these water jars which of course would now be empty as everyone had already started eating and drinking. The guests would have already shared in the ritual of purification through the washing of their hands and by this all the impurities would be washed away and everyone would be welcomed at the gathering and ultimately the banquet.

Our world emphasizes the need to wash our hands not just after using the washroom but before going into each store or funeral home or wherever we might gather. We know that local companies here in Windsor like Wolfhead Brewery and Hiram Walkers has provided gallons of sanitizer for many workplaces and charitable establishments. This is to ensure everyone cleans their hands. Maybe this is not a bad thing to do in the long run?! Maybe we should have been doing this even before the pandemic?

Jesus tells the servants to go and fill up the vessels with water right up to the tope. They are then told to draw some of the liquid out and share it with the chief steward the one who is in charge of the banquet. They do this and it is in this moment that what occurred becomes known. The chief steward takes the liquid and it is the best tasting wine. The servants who are waiting for further instructions are standing in awe of what the steward has just said. After all this was water and now it is good tasting wine. Then it is time to get back to the wedding. The chief steward calls to the bridegroom and tells him how good the wine is that was stored in the large vessels. But the groom had no idea what he was referring to. All he knew was that the party could and would continue as more wine had been 'found'. Not only can the party go on, it is continuing with new wine.

So who knew what happened? Mary, who prodded Jesus, the Chief Steward who came to discover the need for more wine and the servants who had obeyed Jesus. This was Jesus' first miracle but there were no shouts or screaming with joy by those who experienced it because Jesus chose to reveal himself in a subtle way with only a few witnesses. We don't know exactly what occurred next but if the servants had truly experienced the change of water to wine, they would talk not only amongst themselves, but with families and friends later on and maybe to the guests as they served. But what is mentioned in the reading is that this was the first of many signs which would reveal his glory. And this miracle was seen by his disciples whom he had just called to follow and they believed in him. Not only does Jesus keep the party going, he earns the trust and belief of the disciples by doing something amazing.

As we continue to live in this time of pandemic we are searching for some sense of normalcy by begin. We know that how we lived our lives in March 2020 will not be returning but with Labour Day weekend upon us we are wanting something familiar. We are also wanting to take back control over what we do where we can do it and to know that some sort of new routine will result. As people we worry about the future and right now we are fearful of a possible second wave of covid19cases and mixing with the normal flu season of late fall leading into winter. But we must remember we are the faithful followers of Jesus. We are people who like the disciples, we believe in Jesus. They were in awe when they realized what Jesus had done at the wedding. They had no idea what following Jesus would involve or what the result would be, they believed in Jesus and followed. This was Jesus' first miracle and it was a sign of wonder for those in the know. One can only imagine what the chief steward said after questioning the servants especially after he told the groom that he saved the best wine for later on in the party. But the miracle was not explained by anyone- it just occurred. Are we looking for

miracles today? And what are the miracles we hope we might experience? We know that researchers are diligently working for a vaccine to combat covid19. When this is found- is this a miracle or a discovery through science? By definition, miracles are outside the normal course of events. They are a supernatural except to they way the world usually works. And so when Jesus performed miracles they were acts attributed to him that could not be explained scientifically. The majority of Jesus' miracles are faith healings, exorcisms, resurrection, control over nature and forgiveness of sins.

Miracles are ultimately rare but what occurred at the wedding of Cana was but a beginning a mere glimpse of who was amongst the people as a guest- Jesus, the Son of God. We must also realize that miracles do occur today. We just need to have faith and be willing to ask for them, watch and observe to see what will happen and then act. The servants knew that they had put only water in those large containers. They had filled them up at Jesus' suggestion. Did they connect the water and wine and Jesus together? Would they have commented about what they knew beyond the kitchen and other servants? Or would they keep what they knew to themselves?

This Labour Day Sunday leaves many people filled with anxiety, stress and afraid of what these next weeks will involve. We are in need of a miracle- and the miracle is this: that something wonderful and amazing will result because of God's grace upon us and be received anew. We need the wonder and joy of renewed faith so that our lives will go on with hope. Life is filled with hopes and dreams and frequently there are times of hurt, loss and sorrow. What we need to see and do is to pray for a miracle and that this miracle is Christ's love being known and received in faith.

Jesus turned the water into wine as a first sign to his disciples about the kinds of things they would experience with him. We believe in Jesus for he died and rose again for our sakes. Through this gift of love, we also receive God's grace and are reconciled with the one who made us. But we must believe. We must have faith and we must tell this to others. The miracle at Cana was wonderful and the party did continue. What we each need is faith and to pray for more miracles to occur so that God's grace would be experienced and people will have renewed hope.

Let us pray: We thank you God for miracles= the first one at Cana as Jesus slowly revealed himself as your Son and those we see and hear about today including people very ill being sent home to live a good life. We also hear about the gift of forgiveness and how lives

change through your spirit reaching out and touching the lives of those who need your love. Hear us O God in this moment as we pray for the many situations we know that could use a miracle to transform others and the way we ought to live. Bless us we pray as we seek your love and to know you in faith and with hope. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.