



Second Sunday after Epiphany
January 16, 2022

"Jesus' signs show us, don't tell us, what abundant grace is"

Pastor Kirk Kerns

"Fill the jars with water"
(John 2:7)

Let us pray: Eternal God, you satisfy our hunger with your abundant feast, and you quench our thirst from your well of life. By the gift of baptism bathe us in your light, that we may act wisely and do what is good for all humankind, for the animals with whom we share the earth, and for your whole creation; through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Our gospel for today is unique to the gospel of John. The wedding at Cana where the water is turned to wine by Jesus is the first sign we are told in the passage. The popular belief is that this is Jesus' first miracle in the gospel of John but in the passage and in John Jesus' miracles are called signs. It seems to be an unusual sign when we think about Jesus' miracles in the gospels.

When we think of Jesus' miracles, we usually think of him helping those in desperate need. He feeds the hungry, heals the blind and the lame, delivering the

demon-possessed, and of course there is the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

These accounts for most of Jesus' miracles narrated in the Gospels; they are acts which relieve suffering, which restore life, health, and wholeness.

Today's gospel seems a bit surprising if we compare the water turned into wine against the many other miracles that Jesus accomplished. There is something very different about this sign in John that one may think that it might be just a little frivolous. There is no desperate, life-threatening need in this story, no crisis of hunger or illness. Rather, the crisis in this story is that the wine has run out at a wedding banquet. It is a problem which threatens to cut a wedding celebration short and cause considerable embarrassment to the hosts, but certainly poses no immediate danger to anyone's life or health.

The focus on this gospel passage is of course the water turned to wine. There have been references to this passage in movies or sitcoms on TV or in dialogues in movies or shows on TV. True, water turned into wine would be something very special. The reality is that the signs of Jesus point to a truer revelation about Jesus. Jesus' signs show us, don't tell us, what abundant grace is as we read in John 1:16, "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." Turning water into wine is revealing of abundant grace in this season of Epiphany. And what does abundant grace taste like? Like the best wine when

you are expecting the cheap stuff. It is one thing to say, "Jesus is the source of grace." It is quite another to have an experience of it. So much of our worship and our reading of the scripture and our preaching are about telling us about Jesus. During this Epiphany season maybe we need to just pay attention to the experiences that we find ourselves part of. The revealing of the light of the world that came to us in a manger is the true revelation that Epiphany means to us.

One can only imagine the look on the servants' faces or the steward for that matter when the "good wine" is presented but more importantly maybe we need to think about the water and the work of the servants. What about Jesus' mother and her response to the water turned into wine? We know she tells the servants to do as Jesus says but then we don't hear from her again. Why does Jesus challenge his mother in the manner that he does? Well that one points to his time that has not yet come. His time points to his death on the cross and his resurrection. Talk about a miracle that would be on the minds of the disciples and Jesus' mother.

There are things about this passage that are in the background and when reading this passage one may not really pay much attention to them. Do we really pay attention to Jesus' mother? Think about it for a moment. Why is she

not named as Mary in this passage? Is this passage about her? In John, Mary does not get mentioned again until she is at the foot of the cross.

Mary is always denoted by her relationship to Jesus. Here, it is her urging that initiates Jesus' action. One could say that the exchange between Jesus and his mother is really humorous. I read an article this week where the author suggested that there are times in Scripture that there is some humor. The article went on to suggest that scripture is not void of humor. For example, Mary notes that the wedding hosts have run out of wine. Jesus' response is that they could have hired a better wedding planner. But then she tells the servants to do whatever Jesus says. There seems to be this image of the mother of Jesus much like encouraging your child to get on the school bus for the first time: "Come on, you can do it! I know you can!"

But the writer also wondered what she saw in that moment. "What had Jesus revealed to her up to that point that would cause her to believe that such a miracle was possible from him?" How did she know that this was the time for revelation, the event of Epiphany?" (Karoline Lewis)

How do we perceive the servants? They are servants so they serve but if we stop and think about their experience maybe we can appreciate their presence at this wedding. The other people in attendance, including Jesus and

the disciples and Mary were invited. The servants were there to care for the guests and make sure that everything was in place. So when Jesus tells them to fill up the jars that hold twenty to thirty gallons, this is no easy feat. We are talking about stone jars that are most likely very heavy to begin with and then add twenty to thirty gallons of water to them?

Did they just pick up those jars and carry them to the well? There is no faucet or hose but most likely there was a well. So did they gather up some buckets to draw the water from the well and carry the buckets back to the stone jars? How many trips did it take? In the end, they are the ones who know how the water became wine and we are not talking about the 99 cent bottle of wine but the 50 dollar bottle of wine.

If this is the scenario that the servants had to carry the water back to the jars and then return to the well for more water, one can only imagine their exhaustion. Besides the water they have been responding to the needs of the guests. There is another point here in that weddings at this time lasted for days and up to a week. If they run out of wine it does not look good for the bridegroom. Then there is the wine. A fine wine is not made in a matter of an hour or so or that we get the impression from this passage. Water is a component of wine and the wine that Jesus made was a fine wine and if you have

ever been to a winery and saw the inner workings you see the big barrels of wine that are aging.

So what were the servants thinking when they witnessed right before their very eyes what Jesus had done? They could not have imagined that when Mary said listen to Jesus and Jesus tells them to fill the stone jars with water what was going to happen. It happened right before their eyes. Did this sign of Jesus have them forget about their probable exhaustion from retrieving the water? Then there is the amount of wine. 20-30 gallons of wine at one time may have been more than they ever saw.

In these past many months, it surely feels like the wine is running out for us. Just as the servants were most likely exhausted from their duties so are we in different ways. No matter how much we want something else we are still in the midst of the present. For some of us the wine is running out. But there is something else to remember. This passage is about the abundance that we receive from our Lord. No matter how we find the difficulties that swirl around us we can take heart in knowing that there is more than enough wine to go around for all of us.

It seems to me that on most days right now it feels more likely that we are carrying those buckets of water and we are exhausted. Remember that in our

carrying the water back and forth know that what you are doing matters, that there would be no wine without it. If you keep your eyes open and your heart open and your mind open, you may very well see the wine and not the water but without the water there would be no wine.

One reality for me is that this gospel passage is about God's grace that is ridiculously overflowing. It is about God's grace that comes to each one of us because Jesus' Day had come.

John's Gospel does not use the synoptic expression "reign of God" very often, but it certainly shows us what the reign of God is like. It is like a village wedding celebration to which everyone is invited and at which the guests are surprised by the abundance and quality of the wine. The first of Jesus' signs in John's Gospel shows us that the true bridegroom has arrived, and he is truly the life of the party. Amen.

Let us pray: Lord, in the miracle of the water turned into wine, you show us that your abundant grace is overflowing and that there is no end to it. Help us to always remember your amazing grace you give so freely so that we can share that grace with everyone we meet. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.