

Sermon for January 16, 2022

Shivon Miller, Vicar

Water to wine. Today we get to hear a miracle story – Jesus turns water into wine. I have to be honest that while I typically find this story a fun scripture story to engage, this week it has rubbed me wrong. With this text marinating in my head, I spend the week responding to phone calls from congregation members and friends sick with Covid, with individuals receiving news of difficult diagnoses, praying for those who sit beside bedsides of their loved ones approaching their last earthly days. I walked with my two high school students as they scrambled to finish the school quarter without teachers or staffing at the school due to Covid absences, nervously texting with them throughout a school lock down due to a bomb threat at the school, beside them as they processed the news of sexual assault and criminal charges of a student at another area high school. This text swirled in my brain as I listened to friends express their concern about the end of their staffing positions, in conversation with churches unsure they can stay open another year, with exhausted colleagues unsure about how to lead forward. Images of these water jugs turned to wine played across my conscience as I watched the images of families fleeing from Colorado fires, politicians locked in violent debate, unceasing lines at testing sites, Ukrainian soldiers in bunkers and tsunami warnings.

I jokingly, but in all seriousness, said to the staff on Wednesday, “I think I will title this sermon ‘Who gives a rip about the wine?’” Who doesn’t long for a miracle, but out of all the possible works of God, why would Jesus bother turning water to wine? There must have bigger issues amidst that wedding party. Were there not more important things for Jesus to do?

It was with this mindset that I returned to the text and noticed two distinct things. First – the miracle does not come out of Jesus’ concern. It is Jesus’ mother that approaches Jesus. When the wine gives out his mother goes to him and points out “They have no wine.” And Jesus actually replies “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?” Jesus’ initial response seems to be in line with my potential sermon title “Who gives a rip about the wine?”

But his mother persists, confident that he will act in response to her concern and the apparent need. She looks at the servants and says “Do whatever he tells you.”

Jesus is responding to human interpretation of need. Maybe this is the miracle.

Let’s back up a moment and consider how this wine shortage came about. This is a planned event. This is a wedding, and maybe more so than even now, weddings were arranged events. A wedding could extend 5-7 days and was extraordinary costly.

We read that Jesus’ mother, Jesus and the disciples have been invited to this wedding. Invitations had been given out and preparations made according to the guest list. So what happened that the preparations were inadequate? They run out of wine. Poor planning right? They are overwhelmed and unable to provide for the quantity and demands of human “need”.

Jesus is asked to intervene because human preparations have failed. The people are inadequately prepared. The humans are unable to provide for their own need. Jesus comes alongside them in their ill preparation, in their inability to provide for themselves and those around them, in their emptiness and Jesus' provides. Hmmm...maybe this is the miracle.

And though Jesus may at first wonder at the concern for the wine, when Jesus responds, the response exceeds the need, which is a questionable "need" in the first place. There are six stone water jars that each hold 20 to 30 gallons of water. Our scripture text even adds "they were filled to the brim." That is somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons of water turned to wine or, in today's common imagery, over 1000 bottles of wine. And remember they had already used up all the wine that had been planned to meet the needs of the wedding.

Not only is Jesus' response abundant in quantity, the wine he provides has exceptional quality. The steward comments that this wine exceeds what came from human provision. Jesus gives quantity and quality beyond human ability. Hmmm....maybe this is the miracle.

Our text ends today, Jesus did this, the first of his signs, and revealed his glory and his disciples believed in him. "Why give a rip about the wine?" Jesus did this and revealed his glory and his disciples believed. Jesus did this because his mother saw a need and believed that he would act. Jesus did this because humans were ill prepared and unable to provide. Jesus did this to bring abundance to emptiness.

It wasn't because Jesus gave a rip about the wine. Jesus did this to reveal who he was, that he had come amidst human failure and inadequacy, breaking into our ill preparedness and inability to respond to real need, to be the one poured out for many – bringing the abundance of God's grace, love and mercy to our emptiness.

This is the miracle that we continue to receive today. This is the good news that comes through the marinating in this text, that meet me in the realities of this week.

One of the blessings given to us as people of God is the Word come through the scriptures and the invitation to wrestle with these texts that they might speak to us through the power of the Holy Spirit today. A number of the Trinity Staff members and volunteers took part in a Vitality workshop this week. Many of the speakers stressed that renewal, personal or collective, begins with being grounded in scripture. The challenge is to believe that, in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, God speaks to us through scripture today. Are we taking time to marinate in it? To let it rub us the wrong way and discover its good news for us in our daily living in our world today?

The miracle....Jesus meets us in our ill preparedness and inadequacy... Jesus gives a rip about you, and in this Jesus' glory is revealed. May we as disciples believe.