

## John 2:1-11 What lies below the surface?

The simple surface story of Jesus turning water into wine is one we have heard over and over. Some believe that the mother of the bride was Mary's sister others think she was a friend of the grooms family. In either case, Mary must have had some sort of responsibility for the success of this feast. The location was Cana which is a very short distance from Nazareth. There were definite Jewish customs for weddings. The wedding ceremony took place late in the evening after a wedding feast. Following the ceremony, the couple was escorted to their new home. They were taken on the longest route around the village as possible so that as many people possible could wish them well. The new couple would have an open house for a week following the wedding to welcome everyone to their home. At this time and place when there was much poverty in the land, a week of festivity and joy was cause for much celebration.

It was in a happy time such as this that Jesus gladly shared. But something went very wrong. They ran out of wine. For any Jewish feast, wine was essential. Without wine there was no joy. It was customary for that time for wine to be diluted by 2 parts wine and 3 parts water. They weren't trying to get drunk. However if there was a failure of provisions it would have presented a problem, as hospitality was a sacred duty. Failure at This wedding feast would bring disgrace to the bride and groom. Mary was not about to let this happen. She went to Jesus.

Initially one could interpret Jesus' response to his mother as rude. But, if we consider the tone rather than the words, we might hear, "Mom, don't worry, I'll take care of things." Jesus asked the servants to fill the 6 big water jars to the brim with fresh water. He then said to take a glass full to the head steward. The steward was quite pleased when he tasted the new wine. To the groom he said, "You have saved the best wine for last!" So it was at a village girl's wedding in Cana that Jesus showed his first sign of glory. And it was there that his first 5 disciples caught their first glimpse of who Jesus was.

In studying this gospel text, I learned all kinds of things that I didn't know. Let me share some of William Barclay's ideas about what lies below the surface of John's gospel story. We note 3 different things about this wonderful deed that Jesus did. They are when, where and why did Jesus show this sign. First lets explore when it happened; at a family wedding feast in the small village of Cana. Jesus was no killjoy. He loved to share in the joy of a wedding feast. There are some religious people who shed a gloom wherever they go. You may know some of them yourself you may even be sitting near one right this minute. They are suspicious of all joy and happiness. A noted theologian C. H. Spurgeon once said, "I commend cheerfulness to all who would win souls, not levity and frothiness, but rather a genial, happy spirit." Jesus never counted it a crime to be happy, so why should we?

Next we note where. It took place in a humble home in the small village of Cana. Jesus' action shows what he thought of home. Jesus

brought God right into the home circle and the ordinary things of life. We know Jesus stayed with his family until he was 30. Home and his family were precious to him. It was in a humble home that Jesus showed this first sign of who he was. To Jesus, home was a place for which nothing but his best was good enough.

As I mentioned earlier, in the Jewish culture, hospitality was a sacred duty. It would have brought embarrassed shame to that home that day if the wine had run out. The why was to save a humble Galilean family from disgrace. It was in empathy and kindness and understanding for simple folk that Jesus acted. Jesus used his power to save a simple couple from humiliation. Jesus example shows we too can do simple deeds of kindness to others to show that we know Jesus. Jesus always saves the best for last. When God shows up, things go from good to best. John wrote; "From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. We have been filled to the brim with the blessings of God. One day we will hear him say, "Well done good and faithful servant."

There are two underlying things that we learn about Mary. She knew her son well. She instinctively turned to Jesus when something went wrong. There is an old legend which tells of the days when Jesus was a little boy. It tells how in those days when people felt tired or worried or were upset, they would go to spend some time with Mary's boy and somehow their troubles would melt away. Isn't it still true, even today when we are troubled, worried or upset, if we turn to Jesus, we are never turned away.

Even when Mary did not understand what Jesus was going to do, even when it seemed he had refused her, she still believed in him. She told the servants to do whatever he said. Mary had a faith knowing she could trust Jesus even if she didn't understand. She was sure that he would do the something. In every life, times of darkness and insecurity will come. Often we will not see why things happen as they do and we ask "why" or "what does this mean?" But joy comes when we trust even when we don't understand. Jesus gives extravagantly as much as 180 gallons of wine.

Even further below the surface, this story tells us something more. In Jesus answer to Mary, he said, "My hour has not yet come." All through his life, Jesus knew he had come into this world for a definite purpose and a definite task. He saw his life not in terms of his wishes but in terms of God's purpose for him. He saw his life not against the shifting sands of time, but rather against the steady background of eternity. All through his life he went steadily toward that time for which he knew he had come into the world. We, too, must think not of our own wishes and our own desires, but of the purpose for which God sent us into his world.

At this point I want to briefly touch on the **1 Corinthians 12:1-11** passage. Paul offers correction to the church in Corinth as regards spiritual gifts. Paul is concerned about divisions, urges unity on the basis of the unity of God. This is a timely message for the ELCA. At the Assembly last summer, the church decided to make a very bold commitment to address diseases that are particularly acute in poorer communities—HIV AIDS and malaria. While much attention has been

given to the other decision we can be unified in our stance against hunger and poverty and the systems that perpetuate them. How will we use our gifts as a church? Can we be unified to use our gifts for the good of the world; to do God's work with our hands especially in light of the tragedy in Haiti.

We must remember that John is writing out of a double background. He is a Jew but he is writing in such a way that will enlighten the Greeks as well. In his stories, everything means something and everything points beyond. There were 6 water pots. The number 7 according to the Jews, was the perfect and complete number. Six was imperfect and unfinished. The six water pots stand for all of the imperfections in the Jewish law. Jesus came to do away with all of the imperfections of the law, replacing it with the new wine of God's redeeming grace. Six water pots, each holding 20-30 gallons. That would total 120-180 gallons of wine. Enough? Or way too much? No wedding party could drink 180 gallons of wine. John is telling us that no need of ours could exhaust the grace of God: in Jesus the imperfections have been made perfect.

Apparently the Greeks have a myth. It tells of one of their gods who puts 3 empty kettles into a sanctuary. The doors were locked and sealed. The next morning when they break the seals and enter, the kettles are filled with wine. So the Greeks too have their "stories." John knows of these stories: he also knows they are not true. To the Jews, John said, "Jesus came to turn the imperfections of the law into the perfections of grace. To the Greeks he said,

"Jesus has come to really and truly do the things you only dreamed your gods could do."

So we have begun to understand the story beneath the surface. John tells us not of things Jesus once did but rather of things he is still doing today. He once turned some big pots of water into wine; today whenever Jesus comes into someone's life, that person becomes a new creation, way better than water into wine. If we come to him with our thirst, follow the instructions of Mary when she says, "Do whatever he tell you." Something wonderful will happen.

Years ago when Sr. Wilfred Grenfell appealed for volunteers for his research project in Labrador a cold barren land, he said he could not promise them much money, but he told them they would have the time of their lives. When John told this story some 70 years after Jesus' death on the cross, he remembered what life with Jesus was like. Whenever Jesus went and whenever he came into someone's life, they changed like the water turning into wine. Below the surface, John is telling us, "If you want the new exhilaration, a life filled with joy, become followers of Jesus."

In this first sign that "revealed his glory" Jesus changed water into wine. The sign, while at first glance appears excessive, directs our attention to God's abundance. This abundance is graciously given as a foretaste of the kingdom to come. Again, we can focus on all that we have, what God has graciously given to us (even in excess). How might we use them to God's glory? What might God be calling us to

do with the time, money, and privilege we have been given? What is God calling us as individuals to do for LCM; what is God calling LCM to do in our extended community. What is just below the surface?