

“Abundant Grace”
Second Sunday after Epiphany – January 20, 2019 – John 2:1-11

Starting something new is always a challenge. The Downs and Ups are expected going in, but nobody likes “The Down Side” of change. Losing control or letting go of something familiar is never easy, but sometimes (especially if you are not particularly invested in what’s up for a re-do) it’s almost comical! For example, some of you may recall the year we decided to use a lovely blush colored, white zinfandel wine for Holy Communion on Easter Sunday. Holy smokes the stir that caused - you can’t even imagine! Was it a crucial change? A foundational shift? A theological faux pax? Hardly. But it ruffled enough feathers that we returned immediately to our old standby kosher red wine.

So ***what is it*** that allows us to accept, even embrace a change? Maybe it’s okay if it’s our decision to change. Maybe it helps if the change is suggested by someone we trust. Perhaps it helps if it is just a really good idea. Or maybe it takes one of those *God moments* that helps us give in and say, “*You know, I really like how this is going.*”

The Season after The Epiphany of Our Lord is sort of like a smorgasbord - a buffet of stories that will reveal to us more about who God is, by letting us befriend his Son, a real live person named Jesus of Nazareth. Because mostly, when we visit Golden Corral or some other all you can eat venue, we make our buffet choices on the old standbys, but sometimes, tired of the same old/same old, we decide to try something **new**. Or, maybe someone we love plops it onto our plate, and encourages us to “*try this, you’ll really like it!*”

The Epiphany buffet has up to eight stories. (This is because Epiphany is an “accordion” season that includes from 4-8 Sundays between Christmas and Lent, and its length depends on the fluctuating date of Easter. So some stories rarely appear on menu. Today, I’m delighted, because for the 1st time in 29 years of preaching, I get to taste the *Wedding at Cana* from a preacher’s perspective. It’s a simple story, really - yet we need a bit of background so that we can really taste the flavors of this dish.

Remember that ***Jews belonged to tribes***, and identified as part of the People of Israel. ***Hospitality*** was the currency of the culture—it was simply expected. ***Status*** was built on ***honor***; and could be erased by any family member who brought ***shame*** to the family system. Hearing today’s story with this fundamental understanding of daily life, isn’t it easy to see how running out of wine was a serious problem? For, failing to provide *hospitality* would bring ***shame*** on hosts. So, while it was customary for wedding gifts to be offerings of food and drink to share, not having enough wine for the feast might signal not only a lack of resources, but a *lack of community support*.

Thus, Jesus’ choice to provide wine was a sign that he belonged to the community, and so he honored it by sharing in the responsibility of providing hospitality. And at the end of the story, we are left expecting surprises - good and abundant things to come - and we catch a vision of Jesus’ mission to provide ultimate hospitality: care, comfort, belonging, in a world restricted by shame and honor.

Weddings in Jesus’ time were social events just as they are now. The celebration often lasted up to a week, and food and wine were provided for everyone, more than one time. Today’s story allows us to peek in on Jesus’ mother, an honored elder, playing a key role. It is she who points out to Jesus the lack of wine. “*They have no wine.*” His response? “*What do you want me to do about it?*”

Now, remember, Mary has been raising, waiting, watching Jesus 30 years (I can imagine she was thinking in her private thoughts, “You’re 30! Get out of the house!” But as any good mother might suggest, “Honey, I just want you to consider that this might be a perfect opportunity for you to begin your Father’s work, to start proclaiming the KOG.”

He trusts her. She believes in his power; so she plops this idea on his plate as she encourages his first flight into ministry. Satisfied with the work she has done, she turns to the servers and says, “Do whatever he tells you.” They followed his instructions without question. Calculating: 6 jars x 30 gallons each = 180 gallons wine. To imagine that for us today let me put it into our world: Roughly 40 cases. 40 Cases of Wine! A miracle! But, only the servants knew what had happened. Question: so, what good is a miracle if it’s a secret miracle? The end of today’s reading answers that: “*Jesus did this and revealed his glory...AND HIS DISCIPLES believed in him.*”

Jesus’ fledgling ministry has already begun to change everything: Authority will shift away from religious leaders of Temple on to women like Mary, common fishermen like the disciples. Day laborers, tenant farmers, and servants will be the witnesses to what God’s story wants to tell. The bridegroom, the steward, and the guests are on the way to believing. Because something was changing, a new thing was happening; and the powers that had held sway for so long were not going to respond well to the change.

But why did Jesus turn water into wine? Well, in John’s Gospel, Jesus’ first public act was not a healing, not an exorcism, not a sermon as it is described in the other three Gospels. But it is the very first serving of Jesus’ Buffet hinted at in John 1:16, “*From his fullness we have all received grace upon grace.*” The rest is us heaping our plates with stories about how Grace changes everything, how Grace changes our lives – but not just our lives, for grace is not ours to keep to ourselves – Grace is the undeserved help, the undeserved freedom, the undeserved mercy and forgiveness we get from Jesus. It is what reorients your way of seeing and of how you live and move and have your being. It’s a challenge offered by a trusted relationship or a really good idea...

Are you facing changes not of your making that are challenging you today? Maybe they are just the morsel God plops on your plate saying, “Try this, I know you’ll just love it. It’s my favorite recipe.” AMEN.

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