A.M.D.G. 2nd Sunday After Epiphany – C Text: John 2: 1-11

 January 20th, 2019

*John 2 ….. On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*

Everyday Miracles

As I mentioned last week – in May of 2017, I led a group to the Holy Land – Palestine and Israel. There were 17 of us in all – mostly people from my last congregation at West Point Grey United – including 10 Chinese women (most of whom were new

to Canada and new to Christianity), a few Caucasian members of the church, plus a couple from Fort McMurray, and an older South Asian couple from Toronto. We were a very diverse and multicultural mix! One of the sites we visited on our trip was Cana in Galilee – the setting for our gospel reading today from the 2nd chapter of the book of John.

But before we get into looking at the story and its meaning for us today – I’d like to first say a few words about the gospel writer, John. The Gospel of John was the latest of the 4 gospels – probably written at least 70 years after the death of Jesus. And it beautifully weaves the stories of Jesus that had been passed down over several generations with a faith statement of what those stories reveal about God – and the God we see in Jesus. Out of all the gospel writers, John most consistently uses symbolism and complex imagery. His stories always have several layers to them – and delving into them is something like peeling an onion. One thing leads to another as we discover more and more meaning. What we need to remember in reading the gospel of John is that it is not his primary intent to simply record a chronology or timeline of the historical events in the life of Jesus. It is instead – to explore *theologically* the meaning of the Christ event for the lives of the early Christian community. In some ways, it is like the difference between reading a history book and listening to a sermon. A history book gives you dates and facts – while a sermon takes the event or the story and looks underneath it for meaning – and how it helps us be the people of God in our day and age. John was a preacher, first and foremost.

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So – in our story today about the wedding at Cana – if all we come away with is that Jesus turned water into wine – then we will have really missed the point John was trying to get across! There are so many meanings to be poured out from the water

jugs at Cana that it’s hard to know where to start.

So – let’s begin where John does – with a joyous occasion in the life of the local community – a wedding. In those days, the bride and groom celebrated the marriage – not with a honeymoon, but with a seven-day wedding feast at the home of the groom. At this particular wedding, the celebration is in trouble because the wine is giving out before the party is over. The hosts couldn’t just say to their guests “Party’s over!” and turn out the lights. This was a big deal. It was a major embarrassment and scandal. And it would be hard for any host to show their face again, if something wasn’t done to save the day.

This is where Jesus enters the story. At the behest of his mother, Mary, he orders that the servants fill the 6 empty stone jugs that were normally used for ritual cleansing. No small feat in itself! Remember, they held about 30 gallons each, and the water would need to be drawn from a well nearby and transported to the jugs bucket by bucket.

When a cup is offered to the steward – imagine his surprise – and the host’s relief – when he discovers not water – but the finest of wines. *“The steward called the bridegroom and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now."*

As miracle stories go – this one is a bit strange. We can miss the point by concentrating too much on the surface questions that might come to mind – troubling ourselves with whether or not God might have suspended the laws of nature so that an embarrassed father of the groom can fill his guest’s wineglasses one more time! So what is John’s point? Why is this miracle recorded in scripture – and why is it the *first* miracle that Jesus performs – at least according to John– who, by the way, is the only one of the four gospel writers to tell this story?

One thing this story teaches us is about the abundance of God’s grace in our lives. Imagine again, the host of that wedding party. It was his responsibility to make sure everything went well and that everyone was happy. And then imagine how he felt when the wine ran out. It makes me think of all the times I’ve worried about letting people down – particularly the people I love. It makes me think about times I’ve worried I didn’t have enough – or that I *wasn’t* enough – to cope with whatever the occasion demanded.

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Think about work. Think about school. Think about home. Think about times you have felt seriously afraid that you would be unable to do something people were counting on you to do – something that mattered. If you’ve ever felt that way – and yet, somehow, by God’s grace, were able to come through in the end – then you know how the host must have felt when those new jugs of wine appeared. Relief. Reassurance. Gratitude. To feel that way is to experience some of the abundance Christ pours into our lives.

Or imagine the disciples, who had thrown their lot in with Jesus. I’m sure their family and friends must have questioned their decision to leave everything and follow this itinerant rabbi. Have you ever started off down a path that you weren’t quite sure was the right one? I am sure many of you spent a lot of sleepless nights before you moved to Canada from the Philippines. Did you ever wonder if you were doing the right thing? And for all of us - have you ever said in a prayer “I could really use a sign here, God, that this is what I need to do.” If you’ve ever felt that way – and then have things work out for you in the end – you probably know how Jesus’ disciples felt after the wedding at Cana, when they saw what he did, how God’s grace was visible in him – and believed. In the gospel according to John, signs are given as encouragement, as help, and to strengthen belief. The events at Cana, so early in Jesus’ ministry, helped his disciples to believe in him – to know that they had done the right thing in following him. And if you’ve ever felt your decisions and your faith confirmed in some way - then you, too have felt something of that abundant grace the disciples felt that day.

One of the meanings inherent in this passage, I believe – is that miracles occur in simple things – on ordinary days – to common folk like you and me. Thank God for the abundance of grace that we can draw upon in good times and bad! And thank God for the miracles every day that lift us up and keep us going! I’m convinced that God gives us an abundance of miracles every day – blessings much deeper than we can every imagine or deserve. Want some examples?

I celebrate the change I can see in someone’s life when they hear words of appreciation or love. I celebrate the stunning miracle of life I see transformed by the recognition of God’s grace and forgiveness. I celebrate the children here at Lakeview – and their gifts of wonder and exuberance – and the joy they bring to all of us! I celebrate the amazing things that can happen here when people are willing to share their gifts. I celebrate the good news of cancer in remission and health restored, of a full time job offered. I celebrate the miracles of compassion and caring I see expressed in this place and the miracle of what faithful giving can do in our church.

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Isn’t it about time that we recognize God is at work in miraculous ways all the time? Isn’t it about time that we affirmed the signs of God’s abundance and overflowing grace instead of being so focussed on what we think we don’t have? Just like the simple, ordinary folk at the wedding at Cana – we need to celebrate God’s generous outpouring – far more than we deserve. And open our hearts and our lives to the abundance of God’s grace.

As Ann Weems, in her wonderful book ‘Reaching For Rainbows’ reminds us:

 God works miracles in common clay pots;

 Changing caterpillars into butterflies

 and water into wine.

 Changing winter to springtime;

 and lives from ordinary to abundant.

 We, as God’s celebrants, are called to dance through this world together:

 listening for God’s music;

 responding to God’s Word;

 praising God with clapping hands and moving feet;

 praising God with justice and mercy and humbleness;

 praising God with changed lives.

 So - let us celebrate the church of Jesus Christ

 where the wonderful wildness of God

 breaks through common clay pots

 and fills us with a holy spirit that overflows,

 and every day is a marvellous, glorious, festival of faith!