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Sermon – John 2:1-11
January 20, 2019
Look Closer

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us this morning.. Amen.

Um

Upon first blush this looks like a story about a wedding. Everyone who has planned or hosted a wedding knows something is going to go wrong. When we got married the minister said with a tone of excitement and curiosity – something will go wrong, I wonder what it will be! I remember one wedding I attended where they didn't ask for RSVP's, so they had mountains of food left over. Better safe than sorry. Sometimes the family can eat for a week on the leftovers while the newlyweds are relaxing in the sun. But in the case of the wedding at Cana, instead of honeymooning, the culture was for the groom to host a 7-day wedding feast – parents of the bride, you're off the hook! It's the event of their lives – and now we're talking about a lot more food and drink in a culture where running out creates a social disaster from which the family will not recover. If it were a summertime wedding on Gabriola, the appearance of 150 gallons of water would be a miracle of its own – wow, that's fancy! Where did this water come from? It didn't even rain last night – it's a miracle!

If we look a little closer, there is a story within the wedding story, it's about a mother and a son . . . it's a bit different than the one we heard a few weeks ago of a young and innocent Mary, the obedient servant of God, with a newborn baby. 30 years later she is a Jewish mother with grown children. She is still involved in their lives and shows herself in this story to be a bit bossy. She basically tells Jesus he should fix their wine problem and then tells the servants to follow Jesus' direction. She has pretty good control over the situation. When Jesus' responds to her with "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come," it is not meant to be rude, rather in the context of their culture, it's a statement of disengagement or distancing from her. As Jesus takes his first few steps in ministry he has to set new boundaries with his mother and redefine his relationship with her. Jesus has always

belonged to God while living in the human world . . . he has always lived a life within a life . . . but now he is fully embodying that inner life.

The deeper we look into the text, the more stories we find, like Russian nesting dolls of meaning within the words. Nestled at the core of the text is a story of Jesus making a sign for his new disciples. Here, with one blessing he anonymously showers the party with the gift of abundance while providing a sign to his disciples that they might believe in him.

There are many miracle stories in the gospels, yet it is unusual for one receiving a blessing from Jesus to be unaware of the source of their good fortune. When the person in charge at the feast tastes the wine, he assumes the host has done something very unusual and classy by saving the best for last. Within the confines of this story the host never discovers what Jesus does to save him. I imagine him staring blankly at the chief steward, trying to find a classy response to a miracle.

John included this scene to begin to reveal to the reader the new thing God is doing, and he did it with layers of story and symbolism. John describes Mary telling the servants to **follow** what Jesus says; he identifies stone jars used for rites of purification as vessels for God's new sign; water filled to the brim foreshadows Jesus as living water, offered in abundance; and wine foreshadows the cup from which we drink.

John writes to communicate to his community the power of Jesus and the gift we receive when we believe in him. By all accounts, John's community was suffering and needed not only the hope that is found in Jesus, but the direct relationship with Christ that devotion provides. When Jesus reveals himself to his disciples at the wedding at Cana, he invites them into this life within a life which is difficult to put words on . . . when we look closer within our practice of faith, there is a world we share with our sisters and brothers in faith, regardless of denomination, and it grows and deepens as our awareness of it and engagement with it expands.

I was on my deck over the summer reading commentaries . . . I got up and walked toward the door to get a cup of tea when I saw on the side of the house one of those beautiful brown beetles with a

geometric pattern on its back. They're just stunning. I stopped to say "hello, you're beautiful," when I looked closer and saw it was trailing one of Joy's hairs. When I went to gently remove it, I noticed the beetle was also trailing a piece of a spider web. When I tried to remove that, the beetle stopped walking and stood still and I noticed its wings were strapped to its body by a spider's web, as if it had inadvertently walked through a web that had been broken and abandoned. So I found a small stick in the yard and was able to pin down the trailing piece of web and remove the excess without pulling at the beetle's leg. While I worked the beetle took its back legs and rubbed them over its back, as if to say, see, this is my real problem. Yes, I see, I told the beetle and started gently moving the stick across the strands of web. A few at a time, the fibres broke and I was able to slip the web off like a candy wrapper. When he was free the beetle opened and stretched his wings and flew onto my shoulder for maybe 2 seconds and then was gone. I turned around and looked in the direction he flew and wondered if I had really just connected with a beetle – what world had I just entered and what else lives there?

Discipleship is its own world – it's a distinct life within the lives we live. Living in that world means choosing to look at our neighbours with eyes of love; it's responding to a call to serve in a particular way; it's a hunger for God; it's seeking God in the midst of loneliness; seeking wisdom in the stories of our faith; it is celebrating our unity in diversity across the church. This world we know in Christ is often hidden from view, but that doesn't make it any less real. Though Jesus is hidden from view, he is not only here, his power is being manifest in the world and he invites us to join him in this life within a life. We don't need a plan, we don't need training, we need only believe that God is doing a new thing and we want to be a part of it. Jesus will lead us and teach us along the way.