



Epiphany 2: January 17, 2016

John 2:1-11

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.

Most of us think of weddings as occasions that are in a category all by themselves, separate and apart from everyday life. This has to do both with how important weddings are in people's lives, and in this day and time, it also has to do with the industry that has sprung up around weddings. And so most weddings these days require many, many special things: special clothes, a very special setting, special words, special guests and, of course, lots of special food and drink. Everything must be special: the clothes more beautiful than our everyday clothes, the setting more exquisitely decorated than our everyday setting, the words more solemn and joyful than our everyday words, the guests more carefully chosen and more artfully invited than our everyday companions, the food and drink more plentiful, more sumptuous and more delicious than our everyday food.

I, like many other clergy, have had quite a lot of experience officiating at and attending weddings. I have watched countless couples come together to make their vows with jangly nerves, shaky hands and trembling lips. I have seen men and women stand before me literally in tears, yes, on account of their feelings of love for their soon to be husband or wife but also on account of all the pressure on them to make their wedding not only special but spectacular.

And yet, and yet, if we make our way through all the suits and dresses, through all the satin and flowers, through all the questions and vows and blessings, through all the aunts and uncles and cousins and friends, through all the punch, pâté and pinot grigio; if we make our way through all these things, in my view, what we will find are all the questions of ordinary life—right there at the heart of a wedding— questions that you and I ask ourselves everyday: Questions like these: Where am I located? Who or what am I committed to and what is the nature of that commitment? Who is my community? What am I going to wear and what am I going to eat and drinks? And so weddings are not really outside or separate from everyday life; they are intensifications of ordinary life—intensifications of the questions and the experience of being alive, of living the human life we are all living.

And so, if this is the view we take, that weddings are a kind of intensified drama of what it's like to be alive, we see a particular version of that drama today in our story of the wedding at Cana of Galilee, a wedding to which Jesus, Jesus' mother and some of the disciples have been invited. We see a particular version of the human story, a story in which all those earlier questions I posed are, of course, being asked—questions like: Where are we located? Who or what are we committed to and what is the nature of that commitment? Who is our community? What will we wear and eat and drink? We see a story in which all of this is going on when something unexpected happens: they run out of wine.

Think of it. There they all are in the middle of an event that is emblematic of life itself when they suddenly discover that they have run out of the thing that carries their sense of celebration and joy and community with one another. They run out of wine.

And so this morning before we ever get to what Jesus brings as his gift to this wedding in Cana of Galilee, I wonder: where are you finding that you're running out of wine in your life? Where is your sense of joy and celebration and community with others draining away from you? Where is it gone? Or to ask another question, where are you running low on this same wine here in this parish or here in our diocese? Or how about this: Where in our Anglican Communion as a whole are we unable to access the joy, the sense of celebration and the sense of community with one another in the middle of asking our important questions: Where are we located? Who or what are we committed to and what is the nature of those commitments? Who is our community? What will we wear and eat and drink?

For you see, without sensing that we may have run out of wine, without an honest admission that our wine is gone, Jesus will not have much to offer us, will have little to add to our lives. He will instead sit there as a passive guest, not active because, well, why would he be? Why should he be?

And so it is important, so important, to have the courage and in some cases the simple and brash innocence just to say it. I have no wine. We have no wine. We have been out of wine for weeks, months, even years!

For once we say it, somehow, someday, a new presence may make itself available to us, a new presence that gives us access to our joy again, access to our kinship with others again access to the gift of our lives again, all which renews our sense of celebration, the sense of celebration that we had lost.

It will not come a literal transformation of water into wine the way it does in our Gospel for this morning, that is, as if by magic, for this is not really John's point in his telling of story of the wedding at Cana. It will come in and through a lived intimacy with a God, a heightened awareness of a God, who in the Gospel of John is the creator ("In the beginning was the Word and Word was with God and the Word was God...All things came into being through him."), a God who is the lover of souls ("For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son"), a God who has lived every dimension of our lives ("the Word was made flesh and lived among us") and a God through whom all humanity became one family of God ("And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself"). For in John, that wedding guest sitting quietly with his mother and his friends is none other than all holiness, all human solidarity, all renewed consciousness, all life's giftedness in our very midst, so close and so ordinary we can touch it, so close and so human we, ourselves, can become it.

This, then is what Jesus is all about: God's very self, inhabiting human life, God's very self, asking the very same questions we ask in our lives, God's very self, creating new capacities in us: the capacity to live ordinary moments in ordinary places and to see them for the extraordinary moments that they really are, the capacity to have ordinary relationships and to see them for the extraordinary relationships that they really are, the capacity to make ordinary commitments and to see them for the extraordinary commitments that they really are; the capacity to live in community with ordinary people and to see this for the extraordinary community that it really is, and yes, the capacity to wear ordinary clothes and eat and drink ordinary food and to experience these as the extraordinary gifts that they really are.

And so, this morning, the people gathered here in this church, and all people of our beloved rascally, frustrating, gifted Anglican Communion, we have run out of wine, in our fractiousness, in our grief, and in our fatigue. We have surely run out of wine. But look there, just as we say this, there he is, the Holy One among us, there he is, telling the servants to fetch the stone jars and to fill them up to very brim with the ordinary water of our lives. Fill them up to the brim, he tells them, so that we can taste all that is extraordinary again. There he is. There he is. Here he is.

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