

What concern is that to you and to me?

Psalm 36:5-10

John 2:1-11

Please pray with me:

Lord of life, you come to us, surprising us with the unexpected Word, the hidden presence. Open our eyes to see you, our spirits to know you, our hearts to receive you, and our lives to live into your invitation to us this day. And may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

As a pastor, I get in on more than any one person's fair share of weddings. By and large, weddings are joyous occasions, full of promise and hope. They are a statement of faith, an investment in mutual commitment, an expression of abiding love. Weddings are a time when family and friends come together to smile and sigh, dance and laugh, hug and kiss. They invite us to deck ourselves out in our very best finery, to fit our hearts with a willingness to hope and dream. Yes, weddings are joyous occasions. But as everyone who has ever planned a wedding or been in a wedding knows, weddings are also among the most stressful of all occasions. In fact, The Wedding is listed among the ten most stressful life events.¹

I have certainly witnessed enough agitated mothers-of-the-bride and nail-biting grooms to attest to that. We worry over whether the dress will still fit, the flowers be fresh, the groomsmen arrive on time, that everyone will make it down the aisle without tripping. We worry about sweating too much, or if our mascara will run when we shed the inevitable tear. We worry about whether Uncle Jack will show up sober, and if the best man will choose the toasting ceremony to share his embarrassing anecdotes of us in college. Anxieties build over the deejay, the seating chart, and the menu selection, and of course... the wine. Yes, that's right.....the big question is ... Will we have enough wine?

Which brings me to the text for us today, from the Gospel of 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.*

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

In the Gospel of John, thus begins Jesus' ministry. Jesus has just called his disciples, and the very next day takes them all with him and his mother to a wedding. Now these were the days before the honeymoon was invented. Back then, it was customary for the groom's family to host seven days of feasting and frolicking. So if you've ever sweated over wedding plans, imagine the prospect of all of your friends and relatives coming and going as they please for a whole week—cleaning out your refrigerator, spilling on your carpet, dancing in your rose garden. And your worst nightmare is coming true. The wine is giving out before the party is over.

Now, this seems a strange place for Jesus to start his ministry. The Gospel of John has only just begun with the announcement that this is the story of the Son of God... the incredible announcement of the Word of God made flesh – the same Word that brings all creation into being, that breathes life into us all, that shines Light into the World.

This is the story of Emmanuel who gives power to all who receive him, who believe in his name, the power to become children of God (John 1:11-12). That was just announced, a few verses back.

You would expect Jesus to begin by casting out evil spirits, or healing the lame, or giving sight to the blind... but no... in John's Gospel the whole thing starts with a wedding. Well, not even the wedding, really. Jesus shows up at the party after the wedding. He doesn't wait for exactly the right holy moment in the sanctuary to make his presence felt. God-with-Us comes to us while we're living our lives. God comes to the party. And somewhere between the chicken dance and the chocolate fountain, Mary pulls Jesus aside and says in a terse whisper, "They have no wine."

You've got to be kidding me. They have no wine? That's her concern? I'm sure you all have your own experiences, but for me, it's been a week of unrelenting need that started with the poor, sick man named Tim who will freeze unless he finds the means to pay his gas bill. Then there is the woman whose psychological problems threaten to engulf her and everyone in her path. There's the little girl with the collapsed lung, the man whose heart is failing, the son whose back is broken, the father whose brain is bleeding, the daughter whose grief is inconsolable. In each one of these circumstances, I am confronted by the scarcity of my own resources, the smallness of my faith, my limited ability to make a difference. And then on Tuesday, the earthquake in Haiti rocked the whole planet. The devastation is incomprehensible, unbearable, overwhelming and we are united—aren't we?—in horror at the tragedy and the urge to help.

And into this week—into this in-your-face-God-help-me week—the mother of Jesus speaks. “They have no wine.” Jesus answers, as though he knows the urgent world of heartache that longs for his healing touch, “What concern is that to you and to me?” For an instant, we catch a glimpse of Jesus, Mary’s son, rolling his eyes and saying, “Not now, Mom!” I mean, I ask you Mother, if God is to be glorified, let it be for something more important than to allow a little party to continue!

To you and me—and maybe even to Jesus—Mary’s may seem like a frivolous request, but underneath it lies the very present anxiety that is familiar to many of us: “Will we have enough? Are we running out? Can we meet everyone’s needs?” ... Mary voices the universal anxiety of scarcity, and Jesus answers it, as he always does, with abundance. They need a case of wine to finish out the week, but Jesus goes over the top, beyond the pale, past the line. Jesus provides 180 gallons of wine—that’s 4,600 five ounce servings—and not just any wine, but the finest Chateau Lafitte Rothschild 1964. And no one notices. Jesus performs his first miracle behind the scenes, so quietly that only the kitchen staff knows about it. Most of the guests are unaware of the glassfuls of wonder they hold in their hands.

Jesus was not planning to do a miracle, to work a wonder, to reveal God’s glory made flesh and living amongst us. But he responds to the need at hand with the resources at hand. A few days later, on a hillside in Galilee, he’ll send 5000 people home full of fish and bread from the few trout and loaves that he had. In both circumstances, Jesus responds to the need. He doesn’t create abundance out of nothing. He responds to the need at hand with the resources at hand. From the water, an ocean of wine; from the loaves, a mountain of bread.

Whenever Jesus is confronted by the needs of the people, he meets them, sacramentally, in superabundance, over-the-top extravagance, endless generosity, amazing grace.

I can't speak for you, but for me, this whole week has confronted me personally with my very limited ability to help. Certainly the needs that confront us in Haiti this week are overwhelming, devastating, and confront us all with our own limited abilities to be effective. We share the universal anxiety of scarcity. "Will we have enough? Are we running out? Can we meet everyone's needs?" Perhaps it's tempting for us to say to one another, "What concern is that to you and to me?"

But as followers of Jesus, we have the inside story. We are the kitchen help—we see behind the scenes. And so we know that God will respond to the needs at hand with the resources at hand. It is already happening. A worldwide outpouring of aid and care from China, to Iceland, to France, to Washington, to Orchard Lake. Oh yes, it's disorganized and chaotic, and impeded by incompetence and desperation, but it's happening. Through the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance of our own denomination, through hygiene kits, through your prayers, you can participate in the miracle. Offer what you can—your cup of water, your loaf of bread—no matter how small and insignificant it may seem....so that Jesus can fill it, as he always does, with abundance.

The Wedding at Cana. A strange place to start, but a story that reminds us that God invades the ordinary, everyday circumstances of our lives. God shows up. God-with-Us comes to the party. And so all things are possible to those who believe. And now, as the Apostle Paul once said to his congregation:

I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:16-21).

¹ Based on the Holmes and Rahe Stress scale, cited at <http://en.wikipedia.org/>. 11/16/10.