

WORSHIP

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In Search of a Miracle

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John 2:1-11

We are still in the season of the church year called Epiphany that bridges the time between Christmas and the season of Lent that leads us to Easter. In Epiphany we hear stories about people discovering or recognizing who Jesus is. Today our second Scripture comes to us from the gospel of John. Listen for what the Spirit is saying to the church...

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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.



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Among the million or so decisions that get made before a couple stands right here in the front of the church and makes promises to love one another in plenty and want, in joy and in sorrow, and in sickness and in health, is what Scripture to read during the ceremony.

And like it is with flowers, and caterers, and reception venues, and those on the guest list – there are lots of choices.

There are the classics: 1 Corinthians 13 (love is patient, love is kind...). Romans 12 (outdo one another with mutual affection...).

There are the more adventurous, or racy: Song of Solomon (set me a seal upon your heart, for love is as strong as death, and passion as fierce as the grave...).

There are those that need a little interpretation: Ephesians 5 (wives submit to your husbands...).

But a Scripture that I have often suggested to couples as they plan the service is what we just heard from the gospel of John.

In part, because unlike a lot of other passages we often read at the occasion of marriage, this story in John's gospel has a specific reference to a wedding.

And, in part, because this is a story about the gift of God's abundance – and what it means that through Christ there will always be enough – and that is a piece of good news that every couple needs to hear as they enter into a new life together.

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This is the story of Jesus' first miracle.

And it wouldn't have happened without his mother.

I would guess that for most of us, our image of mother Mary is that she is quiet and submissive and deferential to her first-born son. But the picture we get in this passage is a lot different. Because here, mother Mary has sass.



In the story, Jesus is all grown up. He has already left the nest to begin his public ministry of teaching and preaching; he has already gathered his disciples. From the Scripture we see that everybody – Jesus, Mary, and the disciples – made the guest list and were in Cana for the wedding.

One of the details the hosts in Cana had obviously not nailed down with their caterer was with the wine.

The party was still going and the wine had run out.

Mary – who understood her son Jesus better than anyone else – knew who could help – and so in the midst of the party she marched right up to Jesus and laid the problem at his feet.

“Son – there is no wine.”

And then Jesus – maybe because he was the living into this identity as the savior of the world and felt like he had bigger issues to attend to – or, maybe because he was an adult and didn’t take too kindly to his mother treating him like a teenager – whatever the reason, Jesus shot back, “Woman,” (and let me just say....that is not the right way to talk to you mother), “woman, what concern is that to you and me?”

But instead of backing down, Mary, who had changed Jesus’ diapers and parented him through adolescence, completely ignored her eldest son’s question and shot a glance at the servants who were standing by – desperate to keep the party going for the host of the wedding – and simply said, “Do whatever he tells you.”

The Scripture doesn’t say it, but I can imagine in that moment Mary may have looked back at her eldest son with her eyebrows raised and a faint smile on her lips.

For those scoring at home, that would be Mother Mary: 1, Jesus: 0.

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Beyond a battle of wills between mother and son, however, there was a question of whether it was time for Jesus to share his glory with the world. Jesus wasn’t so sure his time had come.



But his mother knew differently.

She had seen the world –

she knew about brokenness that needed to be attended

she knew those in despair who needed to have hope

she was familiar with poverty along-side those who had plenty

she knew how important it was to know that there would be enough...

Mary knew that it was time for Jesus to be about his work.

She knew the time was ripe for a miracle.

That the world needed it.

Was desperate for it.

Had gone too long without it.

Mary knew it was time.

And I get that.

As someone who climbs in and out of this pulpit most weeks to represent Jesus to you and the world, I often wish there were more miracles to go around.

Because every day, it is obvious to me that this world needs what Jesus came to bring: hope, healing, a glimpse of a different tomorrow.

In some ways I am envious of Mary...who, when she needed her miracle... simply looked at those servants who ran to fetch the water that ended up turning into wine, nodded to Jesus, and said, “do whatever he tells you.”

And I have this fantasy that we could look at a group of cancer researchers, give a nod to Jesus, and say the same thing: “do whatever he tells you.”

Or climate-change scientists: “do whatever he tells you.”

Or developers trying to make the numbers work on affordable housing: “do whatever he tells you.”

Or people entrenched in systems of racism and oppression: “do whatever he tells you.”



Or those trapped in generational poverty: “do whatever he tells you.”

My guess is you have your own list of miracles you’d like to see.

Maybe those miracles pertain to struggles in your life that you can’t seem to escape.

Maybe they have to do with someone close to you – or an issue in our city that pulls at your heart-strings.

God-knows we could use some more miracles.

It is past time.

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A preacher-friend of mine named Ellen Crawford True told me about something she stumbled across a few years ago in a Kickstarter campaign called a Miracle Machine. “Developed by experts in fields of wine and technology, this genius invention was designed to turn water into wine on your countertop, just by adding a few ingredients. You choose your wine preferences: fruity or dry, bold or smooth. Better yet, it would be finished in three days — downright biblical. And, you could even monitor the wine’s development using an app on your

phone. It was marketed as a product that was simple...elegant...and convenient. All for \$499.”

As Ellen said, “sign me up!”

Don’t you wish it were that easy?

That all of our problems could have so quick of a fix?

I’ve been calling what Jesus did at the wedding in Cana a miracle, but that’s actually not what the gospel writer calls it.

The gospel writer John calls what Jesus did “a sign” –

that is, something that points beyond itself to the truth of who Jesus is and what he came to bring.

Turning water into wine is the first of Jesus’ “signs and wonders” – but there are more: Feeding 5,000, healing a man born blind, raising his friend Lazarus from the tomb, walking on water.



These amazing things that Jesus did are more than magic tricks or quick-fixes...they are signs that point us to the grace and love that Jesus came to bring – and they help us understand what that grace and that love looks like, and tastes like, feels like...so that our lives might be transformed.

Because it's not about refilling jars of wine – it's about that feeling of being overwhelmed by a God of abundance.

It's not about multiplying loaves and fish – it's about imagining a community where everyone is satisfied.

It's not about healing a blind man or commanding a dead body to 'get up' – it is about trusting that there is more to life than what we think is possible.

When we follow Jesus – this is the kind of life to which we are called.

We can't make miracles happen, but we can recognize, and point to the signs of where we see abundance – and community – and possibility – and hope... even in what feels like despair.

It may not be a miracle, but I can point to plenty of people...some sitting in these pews...who, every day, choose life over a diagnosis. I can point to the teacher, or the tutor, whose tenacity drives them to keep showing up for kids labeled "at-risk." I can point to the unassuming, faithful, and attentive members of your church family who – every week – pray for you. I can point to a preacher who stood at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial, looked out into brokenness, and talked about a different dream.

And I think that is part of what the grace and truth of Jesus Christ looks like, and feels like.

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My friend, Ellen, burst my bubble about that Miracle Machine. For those of you who may have been discreetly googling it on your phones in the last few minutes, you may have already realized that the Miracle Machine was not all it promised to be. In fact, it was a hoax. And the promoters admitted it. The press release announcing the hoax read:

The internet sensation the 'Miracle Machine,' the first affordable wine making device for the home, is not a real device – it is just a piece of wood. The



fictitious miracle, fronted by wine entrepreneurs Kevin Boyer and Philip James of CustomVine, has generated extensive media coverage around the world since its unveiling nearly two weeks ago. The disruptive program concept was initiated as a pro-bono campaign to support not-for-profit ‘Wine to Water,’ an organization that provides people around the world with access to clean water, one of life’s basic necessities.

Ultimately, it wasn’t about a quick-fix. Instead they were interested in the seemingly mundane, every-day life-saving miracles that are more possible than we imagine. To date, Wine to Water has impacted 338 different communities through 984 different water projects that have affected over 740,000 people.

The press release describes this kind of marketing as “disruptive” because sometimes that is what it takes – something to get our attention and lift our vision past the life we’ve come to expect to a life that is abundant...not just for us, but for the world.

Among those gathered for that wedding in Cana, only a few were aware of what Jesus did...only a few recognized Jesus for who he was...but for those who were in the know, their lives were never the same. After the wedding, Jesus continued to perform signs that disrupted the normal order of things – healing the sick, eating with outcasts, offering different perspective on assumptions long-held – that revealed his glory; his kingdom; the future that will surely be.

Signs and wonders – wondrous signs.

Today – Jesus has a church.

A world-wide network of people who are in the know about what Jesus did and who Jesus is.

Imagine what could be possible...what it could mean for a world weighed down by problems we don’t know how to fix...imagine what it would be like for those who have glimpsed that glory to point to the signs?

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In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

