

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Abundant Light

Sermon Reflection Notes

The Epiphany sermon series titled "A Light Bulb Went Off" is focusing on moments when Jesus's identity is revealed in some way. We heard about the three magi first, strange outsiders of mystical origins and faith practices, who followed a star to find a baby. Last week Jesus was in line with everyone else to be baptized, and afterward, when he went off to pray, the sky opened and the God's voice resounded: "This is my son, my beloved, with whom I am well pleased." This week, Jesus was attending a wedding when catastrophe struck and the wine ran out. We don't know a lot about this event other than it was a wedding, it was in Cana (a small town in Galilee) and it was a party. In Jesus's day, the key to a good wedding was plenty of wine which is why, when it ran out, Jesus's mother was concerned. She leaned over and, we can imagine, used her 'mother voice' to point out that the wine was gone and Jesus should do something about it. Jesus was having none of it, but Mary persisted, telling the chief steward to "do whatever he says" which is good advice for all of us--do whatever Jesus tells us to do. The steward listened, Jesus gave instructions and turned water into wine. A lot of good wine.

The central act in the story of the wedding at Cana is the miraculous transformation of water into wine. Contemporary hearers, like us, live in a rational scientifically oriented time. We may find this story puzzling, embarrassing, maybe even offensive. We may want to focus on other parts of the story because consuming copious amounts of wine at weddings isn't a very 'Methodist' thing to do. But the essence of any miracle is that it shatters conventional expectations and explanations. It is not our task to try to figure out how this miracle happened. Our task is to struggle with what this miracle says about Jesus. And that task does not involve the question of whether we believe in miracles.

Rather, we are called to face head on the dissonance of the story. We are called to face head on our assumptions about the order of things and what is possible or not possible.

Jesus did something totally unprecedented when he transformed many gallons of water into good, rich wine. The miracle is one of abundance, or extravagance, of transformation, and of new possibilities. The miracle portrays grace and a glimpse of Jesus' life that is at odds with how we think the world is ordered. Jesus was in Cana, a place so small modern historians don't even know exactly where it was. Cana was a town of the poor and marginalized. It wasn't a place where dignitaries or celebrities of the time were throwing wedding receptions. Furthermore, Jesus doesn't perform this miracle in front of the bride and groom or the invited guests. The first ones to experience a miracle from Jesus were the servants to the poor. The bottom of the bottom. The lowest of the low. The story anticipates the glory of Jesus and the beginning of his ministry.

The extravagance of Jesus' act, the superabundance of the wine, suggest the unlimited gifts that Jesus makes available. The story invites us all to stand in awe of gift, to join the celebration made possible by Jesus' gift, and to catch a glimpse of the identity and character of God.

Scripture

John 2:1-11 (NRSVUE)

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ² Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴ And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not yet come." ⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶ Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸ He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the person in charge of the banquet." So they took it. ⁹ When the person in charge tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), that person called the bridegroom ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

Discussion Questions

1. This week we celebrated another sacrament: communion. Last week, we celebrated baptism. These sacraments are commonly referred to as symbols, but a more accurate term might be signs. Let's talk about what the difference might be between symbols and signs and why it may be more accurate to refer to baptism and communion as 'signs.'
2. "Never once did Jesus scan the room for the best example of holy living and send that person out to tell others about him. He always sent stumblers and sinners. I find that comforting." (Nadia Bolz-Weber, *Accidental Saints: Finding God in All the Wrong People*) This sermon series is "A Light Bulb Went Off" and we are discovering who Jesus is through the people who choose to follow him and to whom he reveals himself. Think about who Jesus draws into his circle. Who are these people? What do they have in common? Who are their modern day counterparts?
3. Pastor Ron said Mary's words to the chief steward would be good advice for us all. "Do whatever he says...do whatever Jesus tells you to do." In our modern society, we often hear people invoking the name of Jesus to explain or justify their actions and beliefs. How do we discern what "Jesus tells us to do?" What type of 'rubric' or guideposts could we use?

4. How do we wrestle honestly with the paradox that we believe in a God of abundance, one who always provides more than enough, and yet there are times (like many living through the California wildfires right now) when we literally have nothing? How do we reconcile these truths and not lose faith?
5. The voice of God is always one of abundance. And yet, the voices of scarcity often seem to drown God out. Part of our human frailty is wanting to, again and again, draw a line between 'us' and 'them.' Nadia Bolz-Weber wrote in her book titled *Pastrix*: "Matthew once said to me, after one of my more finely worded rants about stupid people who have the wrong opinions, 'Nadia, the thing that sucks is that every time we draw a line between us and others, Jesus is always on the other side of it.' Damn." How do we stay with Jesus, with God, when so many other voices are so dang loud?

Closing Prayer

IT IS GIVEN to only a few people, O God, to rise above the crowds and become symbols of hope and passion to all of us. We thank you for these persons, from Moses and Christ to Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., and for the way they remind us of your care and grace for all the little ones of the earth. We praise you today, on Dr. King's birthday, for the qualities that shaped his life: for a strong sense of justice, that regarded all souls as having importance in your eyes; for an unshakeable belief in love and gentleness, that would not permit him to turn to violence in order to achieve his dreams; for a commitment to sacrifice, that led him forward without regard for his own safety; and for an ultimate trust in you, that you would never abandon those who stand up for truth and righteousness in the world. We mourn what the world did to him—the pain and the degradation, and finally the death. But we celebrate the dream for which he stood, of a society where the lion and the lamb would lie down together, and the children of all races and backgrounds would mingle together in sweetness and harmony of spirit. Help us to be as committed to that dream as he was, to care as much about the poor and disenfranchised as he did, to be prepared to pay the price that he paid to insure its ultimate success. Teach us to love all men and women as our brothers and sisters, and to care as much about their welfare as we care about our own. And grant that we shall always have heroes whom we admire for their moral clarity, their unremitting courage, and their passion for righteousness, that your name and your way may be honored in all the world. Through Christ our Savior. Amen.

(from *Ministry Matters*, Jan. 7, 2013)

"With Jesus, there is always more than enough for everyone."