

Our Gospel text this morning is set within the context of a wedding. I performed two weddings this last summer; one in a farm field and one in our Memorial Garden. At each wedding I prayed the traditional opening prayer from our wedding service: “Eternal God, our creator and redeemer, as you gladdened the wedding at Cana in Galilee by the presence of your Son, so bring your joy to this wedding by his presence now.” That reference to the presence of God’s Son at the wedding at Cana in Galilee is a reference to this very text before us this morning. Jesus, along with his family and friends, attends a village wedding in nearby Cana. His presence, according to the prayer, and according to the story, gladdened the wedding that day and brought joy to those present. How did that happen? As we read, Jesus makes the party go; He provides the sweetest and most exquisite wine possible to fuel the celebration. This miracle of Jesus provides us with a refreshing and bracing view of our Lord. Far from being the pale, wispy, solemn man I see portrayed in so much of Christian art, this Jesus is robust, full of life, laughing and dancing at a village wedding, and turning water into wine to increase the joy of all present. This is a guy you’d happily invite to your wedding, knowing He will bring good cheer and high spirits to the occasion. In both of the weddings I performed, where I prayed this prayer, it was answered; Christ was present, and both weddings were joyful and exuberant events. This was true for the couple, their friends, and their families that were present. It was true for me, too, especially since in one case, I had baptized the bride now getting married, and in the other case, I had married the bride’s parents a few decades back. Which highlights how weddings are such mileposts within families, as grandparents, parents, and children are brought together; one sees the blessing of generations at such events. Of course, there’s always a little bit of bittersweet mixed in with the joy at these occasions, precisely *because* of the aging of generations, the passing of the torch, the changes that happen with time. Sometimes those changes are difficult to accept, and we wish we could capture a perfect moment in time and keep it forever. We wish things could just stay the same. But that reminds me of the wisdom that we must all remember-- the one prayer that God *never* answers is this: “Please, let nothing change.” And at different times that would certainly be the honest prayer of our hearts—maybe because we cherish our children or grandchildren at a younger age, or because our aging spouse

or parent's health is stable for now, or just because right here and now, life is good. "Please, let nothing change." But truly--*that is* the prayer that God never answers. Change happens. That's the way of the world *and* the way of God. Change happens, but it doesn't have to be a bad thing; change can be sweet. As it was in these weddings I mentioned. As it is in this Gospel story of water changed into wine.

Let's look at our Gospel lesson today from the Gospel of John. This is the first miracle in this particular account of the life of Jesus. The other Gospels record an *exorcism* as being the first miracle, which seems a far more consequential first miracle—God takes on evil and brings healing to someone afflicted. Powerful stuff, right? But here in John, the first miracle is Jesus changing water into wine. *This* miracle simply saves the wedding hosts from the social embarrassment of running out of wine, and it seems that Jesus does it, somewhat reluctantly, at the request of his mother, Mary. What's the point, we might wonder?

A little background may be helpful. The Hebrew people of the Old and New Testament loved their wine. Among their folk sayings was, "Where there is no wine, there is no joy. Where there is no joy, there is no blessing." Their folk wisdom included the notion that when the Messiah finally came, every faithful Jew would be so blest so as to sit beneath their own fig tree while the streets beside them *ran* with wine. And because of that, this problem of running out of wine too soon at this wedding was significant to those involved, because of what the wine represented. Let's recognize that weddings were huge and lengthy celebrations in this era and culture. The whole village was essentially invited and the feasting and partying might last several days. Wine, being seen as such a chief symbol of God's blessing, must obviously be provided in abundance for such a celebration. But we're talking about a lot of people and a lot of wine. That would get a little spendy, wouldn't it? Don't worry-- those wily weddings hosts had found a way around that challenge. They served the best wine first and then the inferior wine later, when people no longer much cared. But, in the case of *this* wedding, they miscalculated. Even the second-rate wine is gone. The party is still in progress, and the wine is gone. Not only is the *wine* gone at this wedding feast, but with it, the ultimate symbol of God's blessing and abundance is now gone. Obviously, in the big picture of a struggling world, this is of little significance. But, in the small picture of the immediate needs of the host and guests at this particular wedding, it was big. And Mary, becoming aware

of this imminent social crisis, is concerned. Her concern brings about a somewhat odd but endearing exchange between her and Jesus. Like any good mother whose Son is the incarnate God, she turns to Him to make things right. She seeks Jesus out and tells Him, “They have no wine.” Notice that this is not a request of any kind, but just a statement of fact. But a statement that contains a Mom-to-Son code that implies the son should do something about this. Jesus obviously knows the code and hears the implicit request for him to act. But like many sons when prodded by their mothers to act, he seems rather reluctant. He replies, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” Kind of a “So what? Not our problem,” response. His words about “the hour which has not yet come”, are most likely a reference to the fact that he will be facing things of far greater moment than this domestic crisis; things like arrest, betrayal and crucifixion. Given the weight of his ministry and the universal and eternal significance of all that was to come, he appears to find his mother’s request unimportant. That kind of dynamic can happen between Moms and Sons, even when one of them isn’t the Messiah.

Here’s the great part of the text. As if Jesus hadn’t just indicated that he has no intention of squandering his divinity on this small problem, Mary says to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Because Mary knows---like so many Moms of sons know-- that Jesus is going to respond to her request, humble though it is, even if he initially gives her a little push-back. We don’t get many of these kinds of personal insights into relationships in the Scriptures, and this is a funny, awkward, dear little moment between Mother and Son. Sure enough, Jesus instructs the servants to fill six stone water jars nearby, each holding twenty to thirty gallons, with water. They do so, and he tells them to take some for the chief steward to sample. The steward is so amazed by the quality of the wine he finds there, that he tells the bridegroom, “Most guys would’ve served this wine first and then brought out the cheap stuff when everyone was smashed, but you saved the best for last.”

It’s not only the best of the wine that day; it’s present in enormous quantity. Think of the *amount* of wine created here—if each of the six water jars that were used for the transformation held 20-30 gallons, we’re talking 120-180 *gallons* of wine. Well, turns out there’s around 5 standard bottles of wine in a gallon. Which means that the equivalent of 600 to 800 bottles of wine have miraculously become a part of this wedding

celebration. This is an *extravagance* of blessing. There's nothing niggling or meager or cautious about this miracle of water turned into wine---and that indicates to us that in the kingdom of God, there is abundance and overflowing blessing. This miracle is a foretaste of that kingdom of God---which is not only an experience of the future, but of the present as well. God is already turning water into wine for us and blessing us abundantly. But we may not always be aware of that, and maybe the dynamics of this particular miracle help us understand our lack of awareness. It has to do with timing.

As we've noted, in this miracle, water is turned into wine. C.S. Lewis wrote of this particular miracle, "What we see in miracles is God doing in a hurry what He does more slowly all the time." I'm going to run that by you one more time, because it's important: "What we see in miracles is God doing in a hurry what He does more slowly all the time." Get it? God turns water into wine through the processes of the order of Creation, right? Usually it's a much slower process, involving the water from rainfall, and the ingredients of soil, sunlight, growth of grapes, human intervention, crushing of the fruit, time for fermenting, and so on. But, water can and does already change into wine in this order of Creation that God has put in place. In this instance, God just does it in a hurry. This description of God doing in a hurry what He normally does more slowly might not fit every miracle, but it *does* fit this one, and perhaps some other miracles, too. What might this mean? It think it could mean that the world, in a sense, is *full* of miracles happening all the time *in slow motion*—we just don't generally notice them; we take them for granted because of their lack of speed or pizzazz. So we are *unaware* of these miracles of change and transformation, but they are, in fact, happening. Miracles like baptized babies growing up to brides, or brides giving birth to babies who grow up enough to become a bride themselves. We don't always notice the changes or growth in other people or in ourselves, because such change happens slowly, over time. Does that make it less of a miracle? Or how about changes within a congregation? As my retirement nears, I am becoming aware of the changes that have happened slowly, over time, since I first came here in 2004: doubling the size of the building; the creation of the Memorial Garden; impressive growth in giving and outreach; any number of new studies, groups, musical ensembles, and fellowship events; all kinds of new faces; numerous baptisms, weddings, confirmations, First Communions, and funerals; outdoor worship all summer;

livestreaming services; the list could go on. God has been at work here, changes have happened, but maybe without our being too much aware of them. Miracles in slow motion. But does that make them any less a miracle? Change happens, and when God is a part of the change, it's good, it's sweet. To be clear --not all changes are miracles, and not all change is for the good. But when God is involved in the change, there is a sweetness and an abundance that is present; water turns into wine, and it *is* good.

That's how our Scripture story ends. Jesus turns water into wine and a big social disaster in a very small sector of the world is averted. What do we make of this intriguing and frankly, fun, story? Something ordinary, like water, is changed into something sweet, like wine, because Christ is present. When Christ is present, change happens, transformations occur. And the transformation from ordinary to sweet points to the goodness and abundance of God. This miracle is a foretaste of that kingdom of God---which is not only an experience of the future, but of the present as well. God is already turning water into wine for us and blessing us abundantly. And this example of God's abundance and generosity is certainly a model for us as we extend ourselves for the sake of others in any number of ways. Do we do it reluctantly, meagerly, cautiously? Or, like Christ, are we exuberant and open-handed in our giving? That's one of the questions this text asks of us.

And here's another question this text leaves with us: Where is God turning water into wine in our lives? Where is God turning water into wine in *your* life? It might be one of the miracles-in-slow-motion, a change or transformation that goes unnoticed because it happens over time, rather than in an instant. But, where and when does the ordinary become sweet, because Christ is present? And in all of those instances, do we see, with eyes of faith, the glory of God revealed? Water is turned into wine. The ordinary is made sweet with the presence of Christ. Change happens, but it's change that is transformative in ways that bless. God responds to human needs, however humble. And God responds not meagerly, not with just barely enough to do an adequate job. When God is present, the streets flow with wine. God is nothing, if not exuberant, in blessing us. Which means that miracles-in-slow motion are likely happening all around us. Where is God turning water into wine for you? Amen.