

Divine Generosity – The Sign Is In The Wine©

John 2:1-11

January 17, 2016

Dr. Sharlyn DeHaven Gates

Did anyone notice that Jesus shops at Walgreens? At least Mark Lowry, singer, songwriter and comedian posted this picture on Facebook. Note: There are a lot of bottles of wine on that shelf, but the sign above says “WATER!” Next time you go to Walgreens, keep your eyes open for Jesus. You never know where he might show up!



A Mark Lowry photo

This story of Jesus at a wedding in Cana is one of my most favorite stories. I love that we hear of our Lord going to something fun. We know he participated in the Jewish feasts – the religious celebrations that observed special times in history with God. But, I think of them as being a bit more somber than a wedding.

Jesus and his disciples, as well as his Jesus' mother, are invited to this great event, Weddings in Jesus' day were long celebrations. If you think a big, formal wedding that includes a night of dinner, dancing and an open bar is a big deal, then you would really be amazed at the wedding celebrations back then.

The weddings then usually went on for a week. The groom came to the house of the bride where they said their vows and then they were paraded through the village streets

with their friends and family joining in behind them until there was a huge wedding party that ended up at the house of the bridegroom.

The groom (and probably his family) had hired a host or a steward, who managed the whole affair – making sure there were plenty of food and wine and music – making sure all the guests experienced great hospitality.

But now, here it is, the third day of the celebration and something happens that they cannot imagine happening at a wedding – they run out of wine!

David Lose writes in his commentary on this Scripture: “if it were us, we might whisper nervously to some friends and ask them to make a run to the local wine shop and pick up some more.

“But in this time and place running out of wine too early isn’t a little embarrassing, it’s a disaster. Wine isn’t just a social lubricant, it’s a sign of the harvest, of God’s abundance, of joy and gladness and hospitality.

And so when they run short on wine they run short on blessing. Timing is everything. The wine has run out before the wedding has. And it’s a catastrophe.”

Now, we don’t know exactly why this predicament is told to Mary. Maybe this is a wedding of a family member. Perhaps Mary signed her name to help in the kitchen when the sign up sheet was passed around.

Or maybe she just overheard the family talking and had compassion for this family – knowing it would be a family in disgrace when the word got out. This would be a conversation at every table in the village, at every holiday through the year. They would be the butt of many jokes.

And so Mary goes to her son. This is Jesus’ mother who went through extraordinary circumstances to bear this child, to keep Him safe, to wipe His nose, and kiss His skinned knees, to teach Him and to watch Him grow into the young man He had become.

We all think our sons are pretty special, don’t we? But – in Mary’s case – well, her son was unusually special. At least she believed with her whole being that He was and that, if anyone could do something about this terrible crisis, He could.

I just love the interaction between Jesus and his mother. She whispers, “They have no wine.”

And He says, “Well, what is that to you or me? It’s not time yet, for me to do anything.”

But, it appears Jesus' mother did not agree with him. I think this is a scene that could be right out of "Fiddler On the Roof." Mary is, in this scene, a typical Jewish mother who trusts that her boy will be a typical Jewish son who honors his mother.

So she turns to the servants and just calmly tells them: "Do whatever He tells you to do."

I love it! For Jesus, there is no more discussion – no fussing over it, no asking, "what did I just tell you?" No. He turned to the servants and told them to take those six jars – lined up over there - jars that are meant for the Jewish rites of purification, and fill them up with water. And they were filled to the brim ... with water.

Then Jesus told them to draw some of it out and take a sample to the chief steward. And they did. And, we know what happened after that!

Now, if you think about it – a week of wedding celebration equals a whole lot of wine drinking! It made sense that the host would serve the really good, expensive wine to his guests first.

But after a few days, they would probably not even notice that the wine had gone from being that expensive Chateau Lefite (sold today at the mere price of \$24,000 a bottle) to a box of *Franzia* Merlot or a *Gallo* jug of Chablis.

Actually, it seems that even the chief steward was not yet aware that they almost had a disaster on their hands. He was not aware of the disgrace that was looming over this family for the rest of their lives.

But, he was extremely surprised, and pleased, when he tasted this exquisite wine the servant brought to him.

Of course, only the servant knew where the wine came from. The steward assumed the bridegroom had planned on this; that he had arranged for this fine wine to be served later in the celebration.

He called the bridegroom to come to him and exclaimed: "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." Brilliant!

This is a great story, isn't it? But ... so what? I mean, is it really so important that Jesus turned water into wine – as amazing as that is, and as much as some of us might wish for that to happen.

The guys at Bible study last Wednesday night discussed this Scripture passage, and my sermon title, as usual. They sent me a text saying that my sermon needed a lab session!

Why does John show us *this* event – where there is so much wine – wine that we might *want* but certainly don't *need*. I mean, no one was going hungry or thirsty. No one was cold and homeless. No one was blind who needed to see, or lame, who needed his legs strengthened and healed. No one was raised from death to life.

So why? What is important about this message for us today?

First of all, I think it is significant for us that this story takes place at a wedding. And while weddings are special events, they are still part of our ordinary lives. And with the very fact that Jesus was present, that He took part in the celebration of two people coming together as one; He honored them in their marriage vows by being there. And I think that tells us something about that sacred act of marriage.

As you can see, I made a visual for us today on the table – our very meaningful Communion table. The white cloth represents the wedding clothes, special and beautiful, white for purity. The jug, of course, represents the many jugs of wine, and the pitcher represents the sample that the servants took to the chief steward.

And the candle in the middle is a unity candle. It was left here by one of our couples and I am hoping to help it find its way back to the bride and groom. But it says on it: "The two shall become one."

Jesus is present in our ordinary, but very special, covenants we make with one another.

Another point that was true then and is still true today: the sign is in the wine. John tells us this is the first sign of Jesus that revealed to people who He was – who He is.

This sign was so amazing that John says, "¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed His glory; and His disciples believed in Him." His disciples, who had committed to following Him and working with Him, saw a true glimpse of the Messiah in Jesus. It was an Epiphany!

And we too, if we can possibly jump into this story and imagine it happening, imagine being one of those servants who were not only witnesses to this sign, but were also helpers in it.

Isn't it interesting that Jesus – true to whom we have come to know – first showed His power to those who were the "least of these?" The "little ones." The ones on the margins.

And then we see Grace – Jesus turns a family's disgrace into abundant Grace. You may not ever see water turned into wine, my friends, but I'll bet you've seen Grace.

And I just know that when this Jesus – this Word made flesh – this Immanuel who is God himself with us – I believe that if you have the eyes of your hearts and minds open, you will see that grace has been unusually elaborate, just like the gallons and gallons of wine:

-- six water jars, each 20-30 gallons, filled to the brim, 180 gallons of the best wine. The amount in and of itself is extraordinary. But it was also the best, finest wine!

This story tells us a lot about who God really is, doesn't it? If Jesus is God incarnate then it was God at that wedding, turning water into wine, laughing and sharing in one of life's most important celebrations.

It was God, not just making sure there was wine so the family would not be laughed at, but it was the \$24,000 wine! Extravagant Divine Generosity!

When God pours grace out on us it isn't just the tiniest bit we can get by with. No, it is an overflowing, immeasurable, unimaginable amount of grace.

David Lose writes about this sign taking place on the third day: *"After all, it's the third day of the wedding, John says, wanting to grab our attention. And in response, careful readers throughout history have asked, "Wait a minute? Did you just say it was the third day? As in 'after the third day he was raised from the dead?'"*

That's right. Because whenever there is need and Jesus is on the scene, resurrection and abundance are right around the corner."

I invite you, sisters and brothers in Christ, to look for Jesus in the ordinary places of your lives. Because He is there, present, and in His presence He turns the ordinary into extraordinary.

He turns disgrace into a generous, exorbitant amount of grace, overflowing with forgiveness, mercy, love and care. It is a divine generosity we will see.

Who is Jesus? The sign is in the wine.

© Copyright 2016. All Rights Reserved.