

180 Gallons

King of Glory Lutheran Church

Pastor Ruth Ann Loughry

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Year C: Second Sunday after Epiphany: John 2:11-20

*John does not deliver a birth narrative, but still explains Jesus' origin as being from God. Mary represents those who know and trust in Jesus' capabilities even before they see the signs. **When she tells the servants to do what Jesus tells them, she believes not only in what he can do but that he will act. Jesus' mother trusts him to create abundant goodness and models that faith for us.** Where do we need to see God's abundance in our lives today? Where are we seeing scarcity and God is calling us to see abundant love, abundant grace, abundant forgiveness, abundant health?*

John 2:11-20 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." ⁴And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. ⁹When 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 ¹⁰and 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." ¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

May God's abundant love and grace – more than we can imagine – be with us this day! Amen.

There was a night when my mom and dad were having a dinner party for some of their closest friends. Everyone had arrived and they were happily enjoying their appetizers and drinks. Dad slipped away to go put the steak on the grill. In doing so, he made an embarrassing discovery. There was no propane in the tank. There was no propane for grilling!

He came inside and shared the news with my mother. Unlike Jesus, Dad did not say to Mom, "What concern is that to you?" Because there was a sign in our house which Dad had lovingly given to Mom, that read, "If mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy." Instead, Dad sheepishly apologized to their guests and returned in about 30 minutes with Kentucky Fried Chicken.

In my parents' case there was some immediate embarrassment, but much good teasing and laughter about the empty propane tank. In the case of the wedding at Cana, running out of wine would have been a disaster!

Wine was the common drink because water wasn't safe, yet wine also symbolized God's harvest and God's blessing. Therefore, to run short of wine at a wedding also meant to run short of God's blessing, of joy, gladness and the hospitality that was expected of the day. In ancient times, weddings were no small affair. You might have seen Paris Hilton had a three-day wedding weekend? Try to plan a weeklong wedding inviting almost everyone you know in the surrounding area.

So, on the third day, there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. We all know the stereotypes of Jewish mothers. Comedian Jackie Mason describes stereotypical Jewish mothers as parents who have become so expert in the art of needling their children that they have honorary degrees in "Jewish Acupuncture". (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotypes_of_Jews) All kidding aside, we know many mothers from many ethnic groups and religions that cajole, tease, pester, coax and persuade their children into behaving as a mother wishes. Maybe that was your mother!

But John, author of this Gospel, wants to make certain we know Jesus' mom was a guest at the wedding. She points out to her Son, the fact the Merlot was gone and he needs to do something. At which point Jesus replies, "Of what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." For Jesus, once He begins performing miracles and signs, His ministry starts.

Yet, Mary, goes over Jesus' head and tells the servants, "Do whatever He tells you to do." You see, Mary not only knows that Jesus can do something miracles, she expects that He will. She believes that He can and that He will.

Mary has been in on God's plan from the beginning. She was granted the visit from Gabriel telling her of her own pregnancy. She heard the shepherds' story of the multitude of angels. She saw with her own eyes the visit of the Magi presenting her toddler gifts fit for a King. Mary knows her Son as only a mother can. Of course, she remembers the scraped knees and the tears. But she also remembers that Jesus is divinely sent. Her faith in her now adult boy, trusts that He can turn this moment of scarcity into a moment of abundance.

Abundance! Holy goodness was there abundance! From six stone water jars, enough to fill a Jewish immersion pool, came about 180 gallons of abundance!

180 gallons of wine?! 180 gallons of refreshing, crisp, aromatic wine. Jesus should not have used those stone jars, yet caring more for the host than keeping ritual purity, Jesus made certain God's blessing would not run short. There would be continued joy, continued gladness, continued laughter at this wedding festival! Furthermore, the steward notices the quality of the new wine. Most weddings would have served the Mondavi Cabernet Sauvignon Reserve circa BCE 5 and then brought out the boxed White Zinfandel. Not this time! Jesus, the revealed Son of God miraculously turns water into the best and most plentiful wine ever!

Where do you need to see abundance in your life right now? Where do we need to see God's richness? Can we like Mary, believe not only that God can provide generously, but that God will provide, God will act?

Last week, we took an offering for our sister ELCA congregation, Christ the Servant Lutheran Church in Louisville. Together with the other churches in Northern Colorado we raised \$10,000! Praise God for abundance! 180 gallons! Thank you.

Over \$19.5 million has been raised by other donors as well for Marshall Fire victims. That's like 180 gallons! God's Spirit is at work, moving people to be open-handed.

There are times in our lives, yes, when we become focused on what isn't happening? What we've run out of: energy, time, finances, or health. There is scarcity or a lack of what we need. At those times, it is easy to fixate on what there isn't rather on what there is.

At the end of our text for today, John says, "Jesus did this, the first of His signs, and the disciples believed in Him." Fabulous. These disciples' eyes were opened to Jesus' power, maybe they realized his divinity, but they certainly realized in that moment what He was capable of.

Mary, on the other hand, knew it already. With God's help, can we be like Mary? In those moments of inadequacy, shortage or absence, can we not only believe God can act, but go farther and believe God will?!

Mary didn't let Jesus stop. She pushed on, pushed Him, pushed the servants until she saw in real time the benevolent, gracious, glorious, abundance of God right before her eyes. Her faith is a model to all of us. For in our times of need, not only is God present, but God will act.

Anyone been to the grocery store this last week? Did you see the empty shelves? Roughly 8,000 King Soopers workers are on strike in the Denver area where we get our shipments from. Still smack in the middle of this pandemic we hear of lack of tests, lack of medical workers, lack of space of beds in hospitals, lack of water in the middle of drought, lack of housing for homeless, lack of...on and on. It's more than, "They've run out of wine." It can feel like the world is running out of everything.

What do you think Jesus would have done if Mary hadn't been there urging Him on? Would He have acted? If Mary hadn't pushed Jesus, would that have been the end of the wedding party?

Retired ELCA Bishop Wayne Weissenbuehler was known to say, "I believe the world hasn't ended because God's people are still praying."

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Yes, we are! Because we, if anyone, know the abundance God has in store for us. God can act and God will act on God's own time. God can act and God will act also, when God's people call upon His name.

Jesus, we need some wine! Jesus, we need healings. Jesus, your land needs water. Jesus, we need homes for our sisters and brothers in Christ, for the homeless and for Afghan refugees and this is what we your people are going to do about it!

30 gallons, great. 90 gallons, fabulous. 180 gallons glorious! Yet, 180 gallons is only a drop in the bucket in God's eyes. This week, let us believe like Mary that we worship a God of lavishness. Then let us act like Mary, modeling her faith. Finally, we shall drink from the abundance of God's grace forever and ever, amen.