

Jan 17, '18, Anthon UMC, John 2:1-11, "Good Wine Takes Time"
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"Good Wine Takes Time." Anybody here ever try to make wine? Oh, no don't answer that...Obedient United Methodists don't believe in drinking alcohol any more than they believe in gambling by buying Lottery tickets.. Right?!? I can tell that last one must be true because so far we have received no tithes on your winnings.

Working for us on the farm, we have a talented man with a wine making hobby. He tells me it takes 6 to 8 weeks to make wine and then about 6 months of aging for the best drinking. And really expert wine makers age their wine for a long periods of time to make it good...but the cheap homemade stuff goes bad if kept too long...think vinegar....

Jesus was the quickest wine maker on record, and not the cheap stuff either. In an instant of time, from water...which at that time and place was considered contaminated, in Jesus' care turned into what I imagine as pure sparkling, zesty, yet smooth, delicious wine. However, this fine wine did take a long time because it took a long time for Jesus to come into this world as the one who could change things from impure to sparkling with life. Good wine takes time.

Not everyone likes the fact that in the Gospel of John, Jesus' first miracle was making wine. Among them are the early tea-totaling Methodists. Many involved in the Temperance Movement felt it would have been better to have a good healing or a feeding of the hungry...a saving of a life miracle. However, in keeping with God's unexpected way of doing things, Jesus first miracle basically was saving the day at a wedding where there was a serious wine shortage problem.

It seems at every wedding at which I've been presiding, there has been something that goes a-rye. One of the worst for me was when the stepfather of the groom wrote on the bottom of the groom's shoes the words, "Help Me." When the bride and groom knelt for prayer at the end of the service, and every one saw the unsuspecting groom's soles, snickering began in the crowd, then laughter broke out. I was aghast when the photographer, leaning over the choir loft where she had been unobtrusively hidden, asked me to move over so she could get a picture. I gave her a snarling, "No!" If it wouldn't have made matters worse, I would have said a whole lot more. A wedding is not a joke. Much thought and preparation and expense goes into the making of what is to be remembered always as a Holy Moment. If you think weddings today have gotten out of hand in preparations, try back in Jesus' time when there was no TV, internet, computers, smart phones, or laptops or going to your kid's or grandkid's sporting events to entertain you. Weddings went on for maybe a week. The glitch in this wedding was running out of wine. Now just because they had been partying for days did not mean they were they were drinking alcohol to excess. My research tells me that they drank wine that was watered down, as the wine helped purify the contaminated drinking water. Never is there a whisper about drunkenness.

What was going on here, was a quiet conversation between Jesus' mother coming over to her son, who she must by now know had the ability to solve problems, and telling him about the lack of something to drink, as if she had confidence he could do something about it. Some think that Jesus' mother might have been in charge or helping with the party, to be in the know about this. However, Jesus did not seem in tune with

fixing the problem. He didn't seem to feel that it even was his problem. "Woman what does that have to do with me?" he asks.

Dee Ashley, a relative who used to go to this Anthon church but transferred to Wesley where I was before coming here, taught me a phrase to use when a problem arose that is not mine to deal with. You may be familiar with it. Goes like this, "Not my problem, not my monkey." In other words that particular problem is not a monkey on my particular back, it belongs to someone else, so I should not take it on. How many times do we take someone's problem upon our shoulders when we don't need to be part of it and maybe we even make it worse? Being a pastor it is my natural inclination to want to fix everyone's problems but sometimes just listening to them and encouraging them and praying rather than jumping in to be a fixer is the best thing to do.

Jesus seems hesitant to be the fixer this very first time he performed a miracle...first times are always special and even Jesus may have wondered how special it was to make wine for a wedding. He says, "My time has not yet come." There is a time for every purpose under heaven and Jesus, just fresh from his baptism and temptation in the wilderness and just fresh from calling his disciples, does not sound sure God is leading him to wine-making. The pause in taking up his ministry in this way, causes me to consider that Jesus likely stopped and prayed about it first. What a typical thing for Jesus, or a follower of Jesus to do when in doubt about how or whether to act. But Jesus' directive must have been to do this as a sign to his disciples of who he is, as well as acting in grace to solve a problem for a wedding couple, and so Jesus did a miracle and saved the day for the newly wedded couple. You do need to count the cost of NOT doing something you can do, to fix something. The ramification of His not doing it would

mean that this couple would have been shamed, the celebration ruined, and probably at every wedding anniversary celebration down the line some joker would retell the story of the wedding that ran out of wine, the party that ended abruptly, and then there would be big laughter at their expense. Oh the horrors....

So Jesus' mother left it in his lap...(the monkey of the bride and groom's wine problem), confident that he would take care of things, or not, as he pleased. And so he did. When Jesus does something he does it extremely well. And he did it in such lavish abundance it was shocking. "You want wine, I'll give you wine!" Six jars used for traditional purification rites were on his orders, filled to the brim with something like 20 – gallon pails of water each. 120 gallons is a lot of wine, my friends. Surely over and above what was needed. But really it was not such a splashy miracle as it seems for no one knew where it came from, not the guests, not the groom – (who got the credit or blame for the better wine being served last); only Jesus' mother, the wine stewards and the disciples knew. For the newly committed disciples, this was their first sign that Jesus was over and above what they knew or expected and that he really was the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" as John the Baptizer proclaimed him to be. Jesus' fine wine was used, to purify the contaminated drinking water at that wedding, a real sign of what was to come. The fulfillment of Jesus' ability to bring purification was on its way. What an excitement must have stirred in the disciple's breasts thinking of the glorious future that following Jesus would give them.

However, this sign went largely unnoticed by the wider crowd. Isn't that the way God works in our lives? We like to look for the big miracles, the booming voice from the sky like at Jesus' baptism, or a few loaves of bread feeding thousands of people, or

someone who was born blind suddenly being able to see. Today we look for God's help in random shootings, in Syria ISIS killing innocent people, in war zones, in areas all over the world devastated by natural disasters, in our own border clashes with a new caravan on the way in from the south, with the government shutdown and political standoffs. How many of us are bringing our president's decision-making wisdom before God for help rather than sending in money as advertised recently on TV to get him impeached? Are we praying for the thousands gathering in a recent anti-abortion march at the capital? Wise people are looking for God wherever people are suffering or needing holy intervention and support, boldly bringing these impossible problems to God.

And I believe for those who come to him for help, God is in all those places, with all those people, minutes by minute, disaster after disaster as we pray for the big solutions. But he is also in your home, in your kitchen, in your classroom at school, at your workspace. He is with you in your car, as you pay your bills, as you do your laundry. He is with you in the snow storms that paralyze our area and the bitter cold. The God who turned water into wine is also with the people struggling through addiction and detox, and the God who celebrated the joy of a wedding is also with families torn apart by divorce. A lot is made of the fact that nothing is too big for God, but this text reminds us that nothing is too small, either. John's gospel begins with a big, cosmic beginning. "In the beginning was the word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through him." How much bigger a miracle can you get than that? The Creator's big important stuff. And then in the very next chapter, the Word is at a simple wedding and performs a small miracle that most people don't even notice. But that's how God often works. It was a symbol to his disciples of who he was.

We might misunderstand, not notice or not care, about weddings and wine. But what about when we misunderstand, not notice or not care, about what Jesus sacrifice on the cross really did for us? We have a God who cares so much for us that he sent his only Son to pay the price for our sins with his very life, who can feel what we feel, mourn as we mourn, struggle as we struggle, rejoice as we rejoice, and find us when we don't even know that we're lost. And so many of us misunderstand that grace, don't notice it or don't care. And still God holds to his covenant with us made in baptism, that we have been given new birth, adopted as heirs with Christ, set free from the power of sin and death and raised to new life. Every day.

Every day we may come to Jesus with a request...for our world, our country, ourselves or for others as did Jesus' mother. Somehow because of our prayers God intervenes. Sometimes it takes a long time for God to act...a long time for the wine to come to its full flavor. That may be because we who are left here to do his work do not obey as did the servants who went right out and started filling those purification jars, knowing full well that the water would not solve any wine shortage and yet with God it did.

Today, is Human Relations day, when we ask Jesus to help with the problems of people around us...problems such as people who are suffering from social problems for example battered women, or at risk teens, and rehabilitating programs and other areas that need desperate resolution. Today when Jody and I meet to discuss our mission report we will discuss using some of our Mission Money for this cause, so that Jesus can work a miracle out of our obedience to fill the empty jars with something to work with.

What have you brought to Jesus with to fix lately? A prayer God has answered for me and for you was a gift God has given us in abundance this week, through Becky Marshall who recently started attending our church. She told me that every week her conscience nagged her to consider volunteering at our church. Ms Van felt it was time for her to step back from this responsibility she has done with so much love, and do some other things she feels called to do. But who could ever step into her able shoes? And then along came Beckysharing her gifts and talents. I'd been praying about God sending someone, and just when you think there is no answer to be had...there she was, praying about it herself and being convicted. How likely is that to happen in this town, in this church? Was that water into wine or what? What gifts of grace and answers to prayer have you received and maybe not noticed or really thought about until now? How has God changed your life and how is he walking with you through it right now? All the small miracles you experience continually are part of the larger one that over time changes that plain water in your life into his sparkling wine of the Spirit.

Come to Jesus with your requests large or small. You are yourselves by grace becoming like God's fine wine, kept in these clay pots, aged to the perfection to which John Wesley spoke when he said that we are to be going on to perfection. Good wine takes time, but with obedience to God's instructions, even when we are not sure where they are going, we can experience God making His fine wine in our lives and our world.