

Summer Wedding at Cana
John 2:1-11
August 11, 2019
Rev. Dr. Marcia B. Bailey, preaching

Because today is our “big event” (our Community Summerfest) our sermon time will be shorter and more interactive this morning; I want us to view this story of the wedding at Cana as a lens through which we can think about our own celebration today. It’s not out of line to do so; in fact many scholars think that applying these “sign stories” to our lives in any time or place is exactly what Jesus had in mind. There are no specific people named in any of them and the circumstances are general enough to allow us to insert ourselves into the story, whether that “story” has to do with party planning, healing, eating, dealing with others or even the death of a loved one. So ,seeing as how we have been in the “party planning” mode for several months now, let’s see if we can find ourselves in this story!

This is, for most of you, a very familiar story. It’s the first of the seven “signs” or miracles that are recorded in the Gospel of John. There is a wedding feast going on the village of Cana and Jesus is there as an invited guest. Now weddings in Jesus’ day were multi-day events; we know this was day three! How many of you have planned a wedding?! For most of us it is a one-day affair, with maybe some before and after meals and arrangements to be made. But a full-blown three-day party filled with guests who need food and housing and entertainment is a pretty big deal! Kind of like planning for a community event for months on end!

So, when the wine ran out, catastrophe was at hand. Wine was the common drink of the day; to think that the party throwers anticipated they would have enough and then run out indicates that they were poor planners, or there were perhaps more people there than they had expected or that they were an especially thirsty bunch! To run out of wine would have been not only

indicated inadequate social resources but it also would have sent a theological message. Wine came from the fruit harvest and it was symbolic of the generosity and blessing, joy and hospitality of God! To run out of wine was akin to saying, “Well, God’s blessing only goes so far; sorry!”

We have had some interesting conversations of late about our own “inventory” for our community event this afternoon. Are more than 500 beverages enough or too many? How many hotdogs will people eat? What if we run out? What if we have too many? Not knowing how many will come and what they will need or want makes planning tricky. But what’s clear in this story is the message of abundance: with God there is always enough of whatever really matters.

And in this case, wine mattered. Evidently the servants tell Mary, Jesus’ mother, which is interesting. It suggests to me that either that her family was connected to the party throwers in a significant way or that Mary anticipated a need and went to check it out; we can only speculate. She brings the problem to Jesus’ attention, and it’s here that I would like to have over heard the conversation! In what tone does each speak? When she says, “They have no wine,” does she say it with surprise or accusation or worry or maybe even excitement at the possibility of what Jesus might do about it?! She seems to assume he will have a plan!

And his response: does he say it with condemnation: “Woman, what concern is that of ours?” or does he say it playfully, with a wink and smile?! Who knows, but what we *do* know is that he addresses the situation; he cares. He acts. He demonstrates God’s generous hospitality and abundance.

As we think about the anxiety running out of wine produced at the wedding in Cana, I am wondering what anxiety you have about our own event this afternoon? What worries or concerns you about our Summerfest? (people respond)

Some of our anxieties have to do with this idea of “enough”. Will we have “enough”? Will “enough” people come? Will we be “enough” for our community? Will our effort have been “enough” to make this day a “success”? Concern about “enough” comes from the experience or fear of scarcity; we are worried or afraid that we will fall short, that others will judge us in relationship to some standard that’s not attainable. What if we flipped our situation over to celebrate all that we actually have!

What if instead of worrying if 300 hotdogs are enough, we cheer when they are all gone because we have fed 300 people! What if instead of being concerned that no one will come, we decide to enjoy ourselves with whomever comes; if there are fewer folks it’s a better chance to get to talk to and know someone new! What if instead being anxious that this event be viewed a “success” by those who come, we think about what “success” looks like for us, and judge the results of our efforts by standards other than the world’s?

With God, there is *always* enough, always more than we can ask or hope for! The text tells us the jars Jesus filled were large enough to hold the equivalent of somewhere between 108 and 180 gallons of wine! This was *some* party! Jesus demonstrated God’s generous love and grace, God’s abundance, by not only filling the jars but producing wine that was better than the first. “The God that Jesus revealed isn't a stern and stingy God. [God is] a God of lavish liberality, generosity and extravagance. [God’s] like a manager who pays a worker a full day's wages for one hour of work...[it’s the same] God who asks Jonah if he's angry because [God] is generous to the pagan Ninevites. [God’s] a [parent] who welcomes home a wayward [child] with a ring, a robe, and a party. In turning water to wine, Jesus offers us excess for our emptiness.”

<https://www.journeywithjesus.net/Essays/20130114JJ.shtml>. And so, it will be this afternoon as well. God’s presence in our midst will be enough, no matter what happens.

And what *do* you hope will happen? What *will* make this day a success in your estimation? Let's talk about that for a few minutes: if "success" at a wedding party in Jesus' day was the ability to demonstrate abundant hospitality, what would have to happen this afternoon in order for you to consider our event a "success?" (people respond)

In June we talked about why we thought this event is important in the life of our congregation. We said it was important for the community: to break down people's perception of us, to demonstrate our interest in our community, to meet our neighbors; we said it was important for our church: to work together on something fun, to try something new, to build our confidence. We hoped it would communicate our welcome and inclusivity. We also acknowledged that it was a risk: personally, communally. We would need to extend ourselves in new ways, welcome those we might not be comfortable with, connect with people we don't usually connect with.

Interestingly enough, the wedding at Cana was a 'first' for Jesus too; his first "sign", his first exposure, even if only to the servants, (who were the only ones who saw what he did or heard what he said), a first step into his call and service for God.

We can measure our "success" in any number of ways, but if we can demonstrate God's love and generous abundance with our warmth, our inclusion, our interest in others' lives, in our community, then *we* will take on the role of Jesus this afternoon, and the party will have only just begun!

As we turn ourselves to the Table, we remember that this afternoon we have the opportunity to extend its reach into our community in new and meaningful ways. Let us prepare ourselves for abundance: the abundance of God's grace and love to share with the world.

