



Party Hearty! TouchPoint for January 16, 2019

John 2:1-12 [NRSV] The Wedding at Cana

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward."

So they took it. When 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 and 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."

Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days.

Grace and Peace from the Mystery in whom we live and move and have our being.

"Now there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification..."

Like most passages in John's gospel, there is so much going on in this text. This event happens on the THIRD DAY. A rather significant day in the life of Jesus. Or the death of Jesus, depending on how you want to look at it. There is Jesus' mother who is only mentioned now and at the crucifixion. There is this talk from Jesus about his 'hour' which is how he talks about his death. But, with all this going on, I want to focus on the wine. Does that really surprise you?

"Now there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification..."

Purification! Isn't that the focus of our faith? Isn't that its purpose? To become holy? To become pure? Isn't it about becoming sanctified? Ask most people and I would venture to guess that is what most would say. So what do we do with this passage. The jars of purity are changed, transformed. Here in this text purity is done away with, it is transformed, changed. It undergoes a death and resurrection. The focus is on Celebration, not purity.

The days of worrying about your purity are over, done, finished. Throw out that baby with the bath water, or better yet, don't throw out that bath water with the baby—change it into wine. It is time to celebrate. A marriage has taken place. A union has occurred. The Word has become flesh and dwells among us. The Mystery has become Emmanuel, God with us.

This is the first sign, the first miracle in John, the first reality. Whatever distance you thought existed between you and God, you and the Divine, is forever closed. That distance has been bridged, connected, eliminated.

If religion is defined as a way to get close to God, then Christianity is not a religion. If religion is defined as a way to get close to God, then Christianity is anti-religion.

Christianity is not a way to get close to God. It is a celebration of the reality that God has united with us. There are no roads that lead to God because God has come to be with us. God has come to marry us. Unite with us. Become one with us.

This miracle story isn't about celebrating the marriage of two people. It is a celebration of the marriage of God, the Divine, the Mystery, with humanity, with you and me. There are no roads that lead to God because God has come to be with us. God has come to marry us. Unite with us. Become one with us.

That is what the word "Atonement" means: to become "At-one." God has chosen in Jesus to become "At-one" with us in life and death—from Christmas to the Cross. In pain and suffering and in joy and celebration. One with us in this life and in the next. Or as Paul is fond of saying, "Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. Neither life nor death nor things past nor things to come."

Yet, how many people do you know who would say, when asked what the purpose of their faith is, would say, "Celebration!"... "Party Time!" "Time to cut loose!"

Look, the point of this miracle is not to tell us it's OK as Christians to drink, though it's not a bad reference to keep in your back pocket when holier than thou biblical fundamentalists tell you it's a sin to drink. Referencing this text usually silences them long enough to order another round, because they are faced with the conundrum that either Jesus doesn't take his Christianity very seriously or he doesn't know what Paul is going to write in his letters. But, this miracle isn't about drinking. It's much more profound than that. It's much more subversive than that.

Go look online at all the Christian writings that will tell you how to be a better person, a better prayer-er, more holy, pure and sanctified. That is what we are most concerned with; and so even when we encounter the celebration, we keep wanting to pour water back in the jars of celebratory wine, get on with the task of sanctifying ourselves, making ourselves pure and holy. We keep wanting to pour water back in those jars of celebratory wine, which doesn't add to the celebration, but only waters it down. And to carry the metaphor further only leaves a rancid and bitter taste in one's mouth.

Go look online at all the Christian writings that will tell you how to be a better person, a better prayer-er, more holy, pure and sanctified. But you know what you'll have trouble finding, a Christian writing that tells you how to "Cut Loose" and "Party Hearty." Just so you know what is going on here in this story. The amount of water changed into wine is about 1,000 bottles worth, and that's after all the other wine was consumed and the guests were drunk.

Maybe Martin Luther was on to something when he put the words of "Almighty Fortress" to the tune of a bar room drinking song. Maybe churches should start having as their opening hymn, Kenny Loggins' "Footloose." OK, I dated myself on that one. Please understand, I'm not trying to make light of drinking. I help out at a community of faith that works with people in recovery. I've heard their stories of pain and destruction in their lives, and that is not something to laugh at.

But what I am trying to get at is that the Christian faith is first and foremost a celebration of unity. A celebration of what has already taken place in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. It's not a 'working towards' but a 'living from.' It's not a drudgery 'for acceptance'—it's a celebration 'of acceptance'.

If we're going to talk about sanctification at all, let's talk about in the way Gerhard Forde described it. *"Sanctification is simply getting used to the fact it's all by grace."*

The water for purification is now the wine of celebration. Those clay pots, that's us by the way, who thought their life's purpose was for personal purity. Those clay pots are now to be poured out for the celebration of life! "This man eats and drinks with sinners. He is a glutton and a drunkard," to roughly quote Matthew and Luke. Somehow Jesus must have missed the purification memo.

Those clay pots who thought their life's purpose was for personal purity. Those clay pots are now to be poured out for the celebration of life. "Poured out!" Hmmm, where have I heard those words before? "Take and drink, this cup is the new covenant, poured out for you and for all people." This meal re-connects, re-unites, re-members what has been always been connected, united, membered.

Last week, I was in a discussion with a group of people about the sacraments, baptism and communion, and someone asks, "Just what are sacraments?" and my brother Craig had a great answer. "They are the assurance of what is."

"They are the assurance of what is." The physical act, the concrete action, the making real of what already is. They are the "celebration of what is!" What a great description of the life of faith! What a great description of the message of this passage. That in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the Mystery has married itself to humanity and this world. The Word has become flesh and dwells among us. And that is worth celebrating, the celebrating of 'what is'.

So come. Come to the table. Come to the wedding which you will discover just happens to be your wedding, and the celebration of Christ's union with you.

So come and take and eat, and take and drink, and apparently, take and drink again, and again, and again.

Because there's a thousand bottles of celebration yet to go!!

Amen.