**Jesus, Listen to Your Mother!**

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*“****3****When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.”****4****And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to me and to you?[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%202%3A1-11&version=NRSVUE#fen-NRSVUE-26090a)*] My hour has not yet come.”****5****His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”*John 2:2-5

Listening to Steve G. play “We Are Family” gives me all the “feels” of joy remembering him grooving and playing at our own daughter’s wedding five years ago here in this church and at her reception over in Dennis under a big tent. Having Steve play his groovy and delightful tunes and hanging out with him, Joanie and all our friends and family at our first wedding of the next generation was about as good as life can get.

For any of you who have been married or helped plan and or pay for your children’s weddings, you know how elaborate these affairs are. These days brides get a notebook online or in person produced by for-profit groups called the Knot and every detail from flowers to change of bridal dresses from the ceremony to the after party are written down, budgeted and even argued over. You don’t need to nod your head if you know what I am talking about. If you know, you know. And count yourself lucky if you don’t know these details of all the behind-the-scenes aspects of a wedding.

Now, we like to think that everything was so very different in Jesus’ time. People surely must have had their priorities straight, family squabbles, positioning for power and prestige weren’t that big of deal. People back then must have been holy, maybe like the Hummel dolls people put out at Christmas time or simple wooden figures that we put out in our creches at Christmas.

I need to set the record straight here. People spent entirely too much money at wedding celebrations back in the time of Jesus as well. Families got caught up in showing off and influencing the neighbors and village and had to keep everyone entertained and fed for not one night but for many days, up to a week. People even stayed over and expected food for breakfast, lunch and dinner. You can see how this would be a real financial and emotional stress on the families of the bride and groom.

Don’t forget, women had to pay a dowry to get married. And when I say women, it’s important that we remember that most of these women were really girls from between the ages of 13-15 who were set up in arranged marriages. Most men were engaged or betrothed by age 18. And marriages were set up to put families together for power, finance and stability. Romance wasn’t often the reason why marriages were secured. The feeling back then was romance, or love could happen after the marriage began. *And* romance wasn’t necessary for a marriage to exist. After months long negotiations over how much the bride’s family could offer the groom’s family, the marriage was set, and they often happened in the fall when the harvest was in. A time of harvest was a good time to feast and celebrate.

I love the tradition of the bride being carried in a litter and a procession to the bridegroom’s house. People would line the streets and sing songs. The bride and groom will great each other with poems similar to the ones found in the *Song of Songs* saying, “the bride says, *Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth— for your love is more delightful than wine. Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out. No wonder the young women love you! Take me away with you—let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers* (Song 1:2-4). And the groom responds, *Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me. My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely* (Song 2:13-14).[[1]](#footnote-1)

Once the couple comes together, men and women can join and celebrate. And the feast begins. With the entire village invited to the party, there were so many mouths to feed. In first century Palestine, even modest weddings were marked by three to four days of feasting. And when the wine runs out, the relatives, who were probably Jesus’ relatives, risked embarrassment.

Wine was not a luxury in first century Palestine. With water often not safe for drinking, wine was mixed with water as a daily necessity for cooking, nourishment and hospitality. Wine also symbolized God’s blessing on the community.

Now Mary, who I love, is the first to notice the problem. To prevent embarrassment, she pulls her son Jesus aside and asks him to do something. Jesus, what a good son, listens to his mama! Ok, first he smarts off a little. I think the story has a little humor in it when Jesus says, “Woman, what concern is that to me and to you? My hour has not come yet.” (John 2:3) But Mary wasn’t going to be dismissed by anyone, least of all her son. So, she steps right up and commands the servants to pay attention. She says, “Do whatever he tells you.” And there were not one, but six stone water jars for rites of purification. And they were big, holding approximately 20-30 gallons. Jesus gets about the business of fulfilling his mom’s wish and asks the servants to please, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them to the brim. And then he insists that they, “draw some out, and take it to the person in charge of the banquet.” That person, like wedding planners of today, was probably worried. Thoroughly amazed that a sign or miracle had happened, the wedding planner calls over the worried groom and exclaims, “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.” (John 2:10)

Thus, this miracle of turning water into wine is the first of Jesus’ miracles. What sort of sign is this according to John? Is it simply a party trick or could it be something more?

Here is what Robert Webber says about how God works. “God works through life, through people, and through tangible, and material reality to communicate God’s healing presence in our lives. God does not meet us outside of life in an esoteric manner. Rather, God meets us in life incidents, and particularly through the sacraments of the church.” This is the purpose of the sacraments, of the church—to help us see, to point to the bread and wine, the orchids and the food pantry, the post-funeral potlucks and the post-communion dance parties, and say: pay attention, this stuff matters; these things are holy. (Rachel Held Evans)

Here is what we are invited to do when our own feasting and festivities are running out of any hope. Here is what we are to do when we have long forgotten the joy of weddings and feasts and are trying to make it through the longest month of January. We are called to make a choice.

According to Rachel Held Evans this is our choice, “We have a choice, every day, to join in the revelry, to imbibe the sweet wine of undeserved grace, or to pout like Jonah, argue fairness like the vineyard employees, resent our own family like the prodigal’s older brother. At its best, the church administers the sacraments by feeding, healing, forgiving, comforting and welcoming home the people God loves. At its worst, the church withholds the sacraments in an attempt to lock God in a theology, a list of rules, a doctrinal statement, a building.

But our God is in the business of transforming ordinary things into holy things, scraps of food into feasts and empty purification vessels into fountains of fine wine. This God knows their way around the world, so there’s no need to fear, no need to withhold, no need to stake a claim. There’s always enough—just taste and see.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

How will we respond when someone ordinary asks us to help make miracles happen? Will we listen to the Mary’s in our lives? Will we be willing to take on the humility of Jesus and listen to the women, even our own mothers or our own family members? Will we as members of this church embody the best the church can be by providing a home for those who are lonely, suffering in any way, reaching out to those going through surgery and recovery, sitting down and dining with the grieving, hanging out and truly listening to our children? Will we have the courage to be the church where we all can become miracles? Let it be so. Amen.

1. <https://blog.adw.org/2014/08/what-were-weddings-like-in-jesus-day/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rachel Held Evans, Searching for Sunday (Nashville, Nelson Books 2015) pgs. 156-157. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)