

Epiphany 2, Yr C, 012013
All Saints Episcopal Church

In the name of the One God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The story of the wedding at Cana is only in the Gospel of John and in it is the first of Jesus' seven signs as written in that Gospel. Each of the four Gospels has a 'first' story about Jesus and his first act of public ministry - and the stories set the tone for each gospel, and reveal clues about who Jesus is - and who God is - for each author.

The first thing we need to know is that in the Fourth Gospel, the miracles Jesus performs are never called miracles, but signs instead. In other words, the miracle itself is not really what we are supposed to see, however miraculous it might be. Rather, the miracles point to a truer revelation about Jesus. So what we need to do is to figure out what deeper reality is Jesus revealing through this sign? What is it that we are supposed to see about Jesus?

The word "grace" only occurs 4 times in the Gospel of John, and those times are only in the Prologue (1:1-18). Why? Well, one idea is that we can take the incarnation seriously by suggesting that once the Word becomes flesh, the rest of the Gospel shows you what grace tastes like, looks like, smells like, sounds like, and feels like. If that's the case, Jesus' signs *show* us, not tell us, what abundant grace is. Turning water into wine is the revealing of abundant grace. And what does abundant grace *taste* like? Like the best wine when you are expecting the cheap stuff. It's one thing to say, "Jesus is the source of grace." It's quite another to have an experience of it.

So let's look at the story. The details of abundance are impossible to overlook: six water jars, each holding 20-30 gallons, filled to the brim with the best wine. Think of a gallon container of milk. There is usually one out on the breakfast table in Stirling Hall - and it is usually not used up, even though 30 or 40 people might use it for coffee, cereal or even just to drink with their meal. Now multiply that 1 gallon times 20 or 30 more: I'm not sure there would be enough room for all those gallons on the table! But that is only how much wine there is in one of the jars in

our story. Now, put five more breakfast tables alongside the one and put 30 gallons on each of them. Abundance!

Back in the day, a wedding usually lasted for about a week, and the host served the better wine when the guests actually could taste what they were drinking. It would be only after a few days of drinking and the guests were judged to be drunk enough to not know what they were consuming, that the boxes o' wine and the screw-top jugs of Gallo or Boone's Farm would be brought out! The guests' state of drunkenness meant they wouldn't mind the cheap stuff. (Except, perhaps, when it was time to stop drinking and the hangover settled in!) Instead, Jesus made it possible for the host to 'save the best for last.'

However, this is not the point of the story. John's gospel is kind of tricky to read - things are always different from what they seem and it is hard to figure out what he is getting at. But one of the established themes throughout John is the dawning of a new age. To John, the coming of Jesus as the Messiah has changed the world from what it used to be into something totally new and different.

This is why John chooses to use the word 'signs' instead of the word 'miracles.' These things that Jesus did, like turning water into wine, were signs to the faithful that the new age of God's dealing with the world had come.

So, what Jesus did in this story was not about an obedient son reluctantly doing what his mother asked; and it wasn't about Jesus making sure that the host of the wedding wasn't embarrassed by the wine running out; and it wasn't about making sure that those who were attending the party were going to be able to keep on drinking. What it was about was the revelation of a God of great abundance.

It is significant that the water in the story is special water, important water. It is water that has been set aside for the Jewish purification rites. It is there for people to wash with as a ritual cleansing in order to go before the Lord during the wedding feast. It is good water already, but Jesus turns it into something new. I guess it is like the difference between wine used at dinner and wine that has been consecrated for Holy Eucharist.

Anyway, it is important to realize that Jesus did not take something bad and turn it into something good. He didn't take the useless and turn it into the useful. What

he did was take good things from the past and transform them - change them - into other good things for the future.

What we learn from this story is that the God that Jesus revealed isn't a stern and stingy God. Jesus reveals a God of lavish liberality, generosity and extravagance. Jesus' God is like a manager who pays a worker a full day's wages for one hour of work. This God is the one who asks Jonah if he's angry because God is generous to the pagan Ninevites. This God is a loving father who welcomes home a wayward son with a ring, a robe, and a party.

In turning water to wine, Jesus offers us excess for our emptiness. And what are we to do with this excess? We are, of course, called to do a bold new thing on earth as God does. We are the people whose God is the Light that darkness cannot overcome. We are the people called to imitate the character of God with the same extravagant generosity to others as God gives - to ensure that there is liberty and justice for all; that there is enough for everyone; that all of God's people drink from the fountain of life.

*How priceless is your love, O God! **
your people take refuge under the shadow of your wings.
*They feast upon the abundance of your house; **
you give them drink from the river of your delights.
*For with you is the well of life, **
and in your light we see light.

May it be so.