

### **John 2:1-11 (NRSV)**

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.

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Grace to you and peace, from God our Father and from our Lord Jesus Christ.

My friend Donna Calautti did me a big favor this past week. I was talking with her on the telephone and had told her that I was resigning my call at Saint Nicholas. I told her about my back problems and the rehab I needed to do. I told her not to worry, that everything would be all right. She stopped me and said, "I know, but I like having you as my pastor." And I realized that I liked *being* her pastor and that I would miss it and if I couldn't be honest and say that, yes, it felt bad to leave that I couldn't really appreciate the wonderful gift that God had given me to be pastor here these past five years.

I'd had a rich, full life – I've got two wonderful kids of my own and another two wonderful kids of Linda's. I'd had a fulfilling career, a couple of them, in fact. But there was this thing that I'd wanted to do that I hadn't done. I wanted to be a pastor.

I'm not actually sure why I wanted to be a pastor. You won't get rich. The hours are unpredictable and your life isn't really your own anymore. You feel like you have all of the responsibility of caring for the people of God and none of the authority or power to do it, and while that's not completely true, it isn't completely false, either. People will get mad at you for the wrong reasons, people will love you, also for the wrong reasons. But the strangest thing about the job is that sometimes you feel like you're left holding the bag for a God who said, "I'll be right back" and then ducked out and hasn't been seen for 2,000 years and you're in charge of the reception committee.

Of course, there are some very good things about being a pastor. You get to think about things from a peculiar perspective, the perspective of some books written between two and five millennia ago on behalf of the God whose story they tell. You get to do good things every day, things that are important, things that tell people that there's more to the world than the selfishness and cruelty you see at first glance. You get to be with people when important things are happening to them – birth, death, illness, marriage. You get to help people through those moments, help them learn from them, help them become more like the people God wants them to be. You get to work with children and teenagers and grownups and tell them about a God who loves them and wants the best for them, who respects their choices, even their bad choices, and who wants to work with them to make those choices better.

Today's strange Gospel story tells us a lot about God. You see, God has a plan for the world in John's Gospel. God's son, God's Word, Jesus, is going to take on flesh and become one with the people, reform the Temple and renew God's promises, bring them to

believe and to live into a new creation, filled with God and God's love. That's the plan.

But then Jesus' mother takes him to a wedding. Weddings in those days were a big deal. Today you have a ceremony and a big party and after a few hours, the bride and groom slip away and fly off to some island or someplace. But in those days, it was a week-long celebration with food and entertainment and, oh yes, wine. And the host family at this wedding had run out of wine.

Jesus' mother comes to Jesus and says, "They have no wine." John's Gospel never calls Jesus' mother, Mary, by the way. And Jesus says to his mother, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?" Now, what Jesus has said isn't really as rude as it sounds to our ears, but it isn't exactly welcoming either. Jesus is saying, "We have a plan and this isn't part of it – I'm going to go down to Jerusalem and clean out the Temple and start our campaign of reforms. What is it to you and me that they have run out of wine?" But Jesus' mother knows her son, she knows God. She says to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Now, this seems to me to be an important moment – Jesus is confronted with a human need. In the immediate situation it isn't exactly a humanitarian crisis – the family will be shamed, the marriage will start off on the wrong foot, Jesus' mother will be disappointed. That's too bad. Fixing the family's wine crisis isn't part of God's plan. But, it is a *human* need, and God listens to those. It's the nature of God to pay attention to human needs and maybe that's what the story is trying to tell us. God is generous, God pays attention to our needs, the majestic God of all the universe, Word made flesh, cares about this family's marriage feast. And so Jesus goes into the wine-making business.

And as I walked with the Gospel this week, it felt like God, the majestic God of all the universe, took the time to speak with me. The wine steward calls to the bridegroom and tells 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.”

And I knew it was true – I had lived a full life, I had had a couple of careers and a couple of families, but God had kept the good wine until now. And I found out how generous God could be. Maybe when I was younger I wasn't ready. Maybe when I was young and overconfident and ready to take on the world, God went ahead and let me do that. But when I was a little older, when I was ready to let God and God's people lead, when I was ready not to *do* things, but rather to encourage and sustain and praise God's people doing God's work, then God sent me here. God saved the good wine until now. God *always* saves the good wine until now, whenever and wherever now is, where people meet to share needs and hopes and fears and dreams.

It's hard to see God as generous and active and present when there are crises like the one in Haiti – this poor island with its brutal history of poverty and injustice now has to deal with a killer earthquake and we wonder where this generous, active God is. Well, God is in every plane full of food and medicine, every ship full of doctors and aid workers, in every check and every dollar and every prayer.

And God is in this room. Always has been. In every baptism, every confirmation, every funeral, every worship service. And he still will be, after you and I are gone. That's the nature of God – God listens to human needs. And this is a room full of human needs. Believe me, I know. But it's also a room full of human and Godly gifts and graces and hopes, the capacity to surprise and delight and rejoice.

Linda and I have been very fortunate to be here with you at a time in our lives that we could truly appreciate God's kindly and generous nature, when so many important things were happening with God's people here at Saint Nicholas. God saved the good wine

until now. But with God, it is always now. We'll shortly be moving into the North Wing and learning how to do ministry in all that new space. And our teens will be going off to college and our youngsters will become teens and college students and then get married and have families of their own. And all of them, at each of these moments, will be able to honestly say to God, "You saved the good wine until now." And they'll be right.

I don't want to spend the next four weeks talking about leaving and you probably don't want to hear me droning on and on about it either. I hope we'll be talking about the future of God's people here, which is so bright, and a little about the past and what it can teach us. But I did want to thank you all again for your kindness to Linda and me and for the past five wonderful years.

Amen.