

Do Whatever He Tells You

Saint Mark PC

May 9, 2021

This narrative from John is about a lot of things - Jesus and his mother, his first sign, revealing who he was, disciples were there to see it, etc.

It is always interesting how a scripture passage will speak to you differently at different times. When I look at this story from John's gospel, I think of how this passage talks of shortages.

In the COVID19 year-plus of pandemic, a lot of us have talked about shortages. It seems kind of comical now, but remember the shortage of paper towels and toilet paper in the early months. Fear of shortages of food, and interrupted supply chains soon followed. People were doing home improvements projects last summer who could not get any wood.

Shortages of coronavirus tests were a big issue. Many countries in the world are suffering from a shortage of vaccines right now today, suffering terrible consequences.

Unfortunately, we also saw, among some, a shortage of patience, and sadly a shortage of compassion for those who were most vulnerable to the virus.

Even without this pandemic, we know in the 21st century that shortages occur all over the world, shortages of food and water. We are reminded that there is no such thing as an inexhaustible supply of oil or water or food or oxygen.

The passage where Jesus is a guest at a party, a wedding, is, among other things, about a shortage. It is kind of a surprising shortage, because usually at a

wedding, there is an abundance of food and probably wine too.

It is rare that a host really experiences a shortage in a critical moment like this, let alone a wedding.

In that wedding in Cana of Galilee, it seems the wine was flowing, everyone was enjoying the party and suddenly the wine ran out.

Now I can believe that a wedding in those times was a big deal as it is today. What I understand to be different in those times was that the wedding reception could go on for days, not just into the wee hours of the morning.

A family would save for a lifetime for a wedding to put on a party that lasted that long. There had to be food and plenty of it. Enough wine to last as long as it was needed. A shortage, you could imagine was a great embarrassment.

The bride and groom were like celebrities for a whole week. And so, we have Mary, the mother of Jesus, as one of the guests at this great event.

As an aside isn't it interesting that Jesus and his mother and the disciples were all guests at this wedding, and that in John's gospel, this wedding is the beginning of Jesus' journey.

So if you have the image of Jesus as a stodgy, dull and boring figure of authority, there they are at this big party.

Jesus' mother says, "They have run out of wine"

Jesus says to her, "Woman" (which is hard to translate, it sounds harsh, but it is thought to be a term of respect) Woman what concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come."

In other words, my glory has yet to be revealed, what are you saying here?

She is saying, "There is a family here that needs your help"

She knew her son well enough to know that the glory of God could shine through him.

There is a shortage - something must be done.

Then, Mary the mother of Jesus says something which is one of the most overlooked, yet one of the best and most profound verses in the New Testament. They are words we pass right over, to get to the narrative of this story, because there is so much in it.

She said to the servant, "Do whatever he tells you."

Did you ever consider the wisdom of those words of Mary? "Do whatever he tells you." We are partners with Jesus in mission and ministry, and Mary says, If you want to deal with problems and shortages, whether it is food, or compassion or forgiveness, do whatever he tells you.

Elsewhere Jesus calls us friend and brother, friend and sister, so we don't just sit back on the couch and watch, we participate with him as we follow his leading in the world.

Remember, in John, in the feeding of the 5,000 his disciples said to him, "They have no food." Jesus said

"You give them something to eat.

They brought the loaves and fish and Jesus multiplied their efforts.

Do whatever he tells you. The servant senses that something special was happening, because they could see Jesus acting with compassion for this family. He said to them, "Fill the jars with water"

To our knowledge the jars were large, they could hold up to 20 gallons of water. They were enormous.

"Fill all 6 of those jars. Take what is in them to the steward." The steward who was in charge of the feast tasted it and he marveled. He said, "Normally, you put the good wine out first, then after a few days the ordinary wine. But you have saved the best for last."

Gallons and gallons of wine. The best wine.

This story, like so many others in John can be thought of on two levels. One, the literal story of the wedding, that Jesus changed the water into wine - but secondly, as his first sign and miracle - Jesus doesn't just change water into wine once, but over and over again. John writes that what Jesus does once, he does over and over and over again, often with God's servants (that is us) filling the metaphorical jugs with water.

As people of faith we trust that this is not just a wonderful story of a person who saved a wedding reception by turning water into wine, but a person who turns water into wine again and again, here and now.

Why is this the first sign or miracle that John records?

Could he be thinking that in a world always dealing with shortages, the one thing that is inexhaustible is

the grace and power and love of God revealed in Jesus Christ?

We are already partners with Christ in our ministry here at Saint Mark. SO Sometimes we are the ones helping to ease the shortage of food or water or love or compassion or patience,

We follow Christ into the world in local hunger programs, Creation care, social justice, so many ways we partner with Christ in ministry.

We do whatever he tells us.

Here is a story of God's inexhaustible supply of grace and power, in another wedding story:

In 1845 on the eve of his wedding, a man named Joe Scriven had to be informed by his pastor that the woman he was to marry in Dublin Ireland, had suddenly tragically passed away.

This man, Joe Scriven, was shocked to his core. He fell into a deep depression, and many friends feared he would not survive. People tried supporting him, but it seemed no use.

When Joe had run out of energy, when his emotion was spent, after he had run out of things to turn to, he recalled his faith.

As he started to come to life again, he wrote a simple poem, that summed up his feelings and faith. He decided to dedicate his life to helping others, and so

he moved to Canada and began mission work with the poor there.

When he was there so far from home, he got word that his mother was ill, and he had the idea to send her this poem to cheer her and give her hope.

It wasn't until a few years later that a friend read a copy of his poem, and said, "Joe you should publish this, and so it was published and later set to music.

A lot of us know the words to this poem, as it says, "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear, what a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer.

In our text, the same Jesus Christ who transformed water into wine so many years ago also gave Joe Scriven the supply of grace he needed to overcome his grief. He was empty, he had hit the wall.

Some of you know what that is like.

But this story and this gospel tells us don't give up, the same Jesus who turned water into wine will give you strength.

There is no shortage of God's grace that is supplied to us. Will we draw upon it?

There are shortages in the world today. Food, water, compassion, forgiveness.

If you and I can take the advice of a very well-known mother, Mary, and do whatever he tells us to do, then,

He can transform

The water of conflict to the wine of cooperation,

The water of ordinary life into the wine of eternal life

The water of the law into the wine of the gospel

We may have all taken certain things for granted in years past. When those things suddenly change or run out, where will we turn?

Can we hear those words of Mary, the mother of Jesus as if they were being said to us today?

"Do whatever he tells you."

Simple words to live by!

Thanks be to God, Amen.