

Sermon: They have no more wine

(Preached by the Rev. Paul Wu, at St. Giles P.C., January 16, 2022)

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts
be acceptable to you. O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Not too long ago, I received a card from a member of the congregation, and I would like to share it with you. On the front cover is a drawing depicting a police officer flagging down a driver. This particular driver happens to be a minister—in his minister's attire along with a collar. The officer inquired, "Have you been drinking, Reverend?" To which the minister replied, "No officer, I've only drank water recently." The officer pressed on asking, "Why then do I smell wine?" To which the minister craftily replied, "Oh Lord! He has done it again!"

I love receiving this card. I love the witty humour of that exchange, not that I would endorse anyone, let alone a minister, mixing drinking and driving. But, I really appreciate the sense of humour of that particular member of the congregation, in sending me this card. I called and thanked him, and we had a good laugh over it.

A good sense of humour, what a wonderful thing to have. A good sense of humour is also predicated on a good sense of the occasion. I think Jesus also has a good sense of both humour and occasion. The story of him during that wedding at Cana is case in point.

Our lectionary text this week, particularly the Gospel of John 2:1-11, falls under the season of Epiphany, where the light of God in the person of Christ is revealed. According to how John organized his gospel, the wedding at Cana was where and when Jesus was first introduced, as a guest to the wedding. It would be the first of a series of eight miracles that Jesus would perform. This is where we encounter the story of Jesus turning water into wine.

The occasion that prompted Jesus was his mother, who had astutely observed that the wedding party had ran out of wine. So in verse three, when the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." **They have no more wine!**

Running out of wine was a major oversight. If discovered and left unaddressed, it would've been a major embarrassment for the wedding host.

What do we make of Mary, the mother of Jesus, in offering her observation to him? Is it simply an innocent remark, or did she mean for something more to emerge? To her astute observation, Jesus replied most impolitely in verse 4, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” **My hour has not yet come.**

Evidently, Jesus did not view Mary’s observation as innocent, but as an imperative for him to ‘do something’. Whatever that something may be. Evidently also, Jesus was annoyed. It was not just a simple case of him being inconvenienced, like being told by mom to perform a chore. Whatever Mary had in mind involving Jesus, it was bound to reveal his true identity. It was bound to disrupt his carefully prepared sense of occasion, his sense of time.

Jack Good, a retired minister of the United Church of Christ, in an article published in the Christian Century magazine, outlined the multiple layers of symbolism in this story. First, the story of Wedding in Cana reveal the contrast between what Jesus was about to offer, and the inadequacy of what was offered by ancient Judaism.

Second, this story focuses on the joy that characterizes the emerging realm of God, as a celebration within a celebration, taking place in a life affirming setting—in a wedding.

Third, this story highlights the disruption of Cronos time into an event of Kairos time.

The concept of time in the Greek language has two distinctive layers: the Cronos and the Kairos. Cronos denotes ordinary time—the days, the hours, the minutes. When one opens a calendar, one stares into the Cronos. When one checks a watch, one checks into the Cronos. It is ordinary time.

But the Kairos is different. Kairos is a disruption of the Cronos. A breaking-down of the ordinary, and an in-breaking of the extraordinary. In as far as the Scripture is concerned, Kairos speaks always of God, of the Kingdom of God breaking forth.

I once read a story about a bride who was left standing at the altar by the groom. Completely devastated, on top of dealing with the heartbreak of being left alone, she also had to deal with the planned feast. What to do with that supposedly celebratory wedding supper, where most of her original guests would not be attending? So she reached out to local shelter run by a Christian organization and invited those who are homeless for an evening of fabulous feast. And they had a wonderful blast! What this bride recognized was more than simple Christian charity. She recognized

the possibility, the occasion of significant witness, of Cronos being transformed into Kairos.

Coming back to the Scripture, after Jesus impolitely talked back to his mother, in verse 5, his mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” **Do whatever he tells you!**

Mary has a proper sense of the occasion, and also a great sense of the others. The questions for us to ask as the community of faith, as the community of servants of the Lord, are these: In what ways are others essential to my relationship with God? In what ways are they indispensably present? In what ways does obedience supersede all other concerns?

So Jesus instructed the following. Note the ease with which Jesus surrendered his pre-planned strategy, his pre-planned Cronos, and embraced a new possibility. In verse 7, Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”. Now standing there were six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. And they filled these jars to the brim.

That is a lot of water to be turned into wine, by my calculation, it is enough to fill 152 regular bottles of wine, way more than enough to satisfy any wedding feast, let alone a wedding banquet in a small village of the 1st century Galilee. When the Lord blesses, the Lord blesses abundantly, without reservation, beyond our comprehension.

What transpires next is even more amazing. In verse 8, then Jesus told the servants, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” Note, Jesus did not explain, nor taste it first, neither did the servants. For all these servants knew, these jars contained dirty water used already by guests to wash their dirty hands and feet.

Yet, these servants obeyed, most radically. They listened to what Mary said, they did what the Lord instructed. Here is a theological truth: **it is in the absolute and radical obedience of the servants of God, that God chooses to demonstrate God’s glory**—the glory and the miracle of turning water into wine.

We know how this story ends, in verse 9-10, “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 best wine until now.””

To which, John the Gospel writer added, in verse 11, “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”

This story is wonderfully humorous, short and concise, with a good sense of the occasion, and an even keener sense of Kairos, the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God.

“Do whatever he tells you”, the words of Mary, mother of our Lord. This is a good reminder to all of us here today. As we look into the year 2022, almost two years into the global pandemic that has radically altered Christian ministries, that has put many congregations to their knees. They have no more wine!

As we contemplate on what lies ahead, and we long for a time that we could do so again, simple thing like shaking someone’s hand during the Passing of the Peace, or sharing over cups of coffee, safely, in-person after Sunday services. As we grapple with the challenges of how to build the Church back better, it behooves us as servants of the Lord to remember, to do whatever the Lord tells us.

For we as the Church, believe in God of miracle who listens to prayers. We as the Church believes God who is ever so gracious, whose love for us is so far, so wide and so deep that nothing can ever separate us from the love of God. We as the Church believes that God still speaks to us, through the Holy Scripture, through Christ the living Word, through the Spirit of God ceaselessly at work in our lives. We as the Church believes that it is in our humble state, and in our radical and absolute obedience, that the light and power of God can truly manifest. So speak Lord, for your servants are listening.

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