

Cana's Wine  
John 2: 1-11

Reverend Heather Miner  
April 6, 2008

When the celebration of Easter is as glorious as it is here at Corona Del Mar, the days following can seem a bit empty by comparison.

For me, the week following Easter was a time to rest from celebration. It was my daughter Rachel's spring break (and my husband was at a trade show) so we went to the desert and found rocks and hung around our home. One day, I took down the chemistry set we had bought Rachel a few years ago. The first set of experiments was aimed at showing us a force that is in the water, one which can defy gravity. Put a drop of water into a small indentation and then turn it over. The water clings to the plastic, not falling to the floor. Float baby powder on water and add a drop of dishwashing liquid and watch the powder sink. The first experiment reveals surface tension, the force that allows water to act against the force of gravity. The second reveals the soap breaking the surface tension, opening the way for the powder to drop to the bottom. In both experiments we see outward and visible signs of that which not always obvious to the naked eye.

Likewise, the wedding in Cana makes visible the force whose name is Jesus.

The first sign of trouble in Cana is that the wine has run out. Mary, the mother of Jesus, finds him to let him know. Historians tell us that a wedding celebration in Palestine would last seven days. During those seven days the food and wine were expected to flow freely. By having the financial reserves to serve guests over these many days, the groom demonstrated his ability to take care of his family. But on this day, the wine has run out. The groom has failed. The servants look on; they know the trouble. The disciples watch their leader eagerly, ready for a sign. We look on, through the window of time, knowing what it means for the wine to run out.

It happens, from time to time, in all our relationships, our marriages, our friendships, in our church, and with our God. You may be in a time of life that is filled with celebration. The joy you feel is real and is of God. Still, you can remember times in your life where it seemed like all was going downhill towards a shameful end. You remember those times when you found a relationship severely lacking, or learned something is not completely

right about you, or questioned what God has to do with you. Some of you don't need to remember. For you, the wine has run out. You live in the very real tension of unanswered questions and an unrevealed purpose.

In Cana, Mary is the first to name the trouble. But not only does she name it, she brings the trouble to the only one who can do something about it. She goes and finds her son, Jesus.

However, in the ensuing interchange between Mary and Jesus, the first word we hear from Jesus' mouth is jarring: "Woman," he says, clearly choosing not to call his mother "mom". Yet, note, as do some scholars, that Jesus calls some of those he is most deeply engaged with "woman". Recall the woman Jesus meets at the well. They have the lengthiest dialogue recorded in all the gospels. There Jesus, responding to a question of her heart about whether her worship on Mount Gerazim is acceptable, says "Woman, believe me the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.... But the hour is coming, and now is, when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him" (John 4: 21 and 4:23). Not only does Jesus answer her question, he is the one who breaks open the possibility for God's appreciation of all she has to offer. It is no wonder that she runs from the well to tell everyone who will listen about the man she met, this Jesus.

"Woman" unites Mary to those women who will come later in John's gospel. It is in these encounters that we will learn about Jesus and about God's plan. It is these conversations that take away the barriers and connect the willing to God.

"Woman, what concern is this lack of wine to you or to me?," Jesus asks Mary.

I suspect the disciples are probably asking the exact same thing. A wedding is an odd locale for Jesus to set forth what their ministry is to be about. One would have expected this to be a time for a prayer 101 retreat or for a strategic planning meeting in one of the disciple's homes. The usual leader's speech setting forth a vision for the group is absent.

John's gospel goes to great pains to invite us into its symbolic world. A wedding is an event which creates a new family. The jars that Jesus asks to be filled with water are the jars used for the rites of religious purification.

And the wine itself is a symbol of celebration and is that which will come to symbolize Christ. Christ, God's glory, is what is lacking.

The often loquacious Jesus found in John's gospel here, at the beginning, speaks very little. Instead of a Sermon on the Mount, we are told the wine has run out. What concern is this to the disciples and to us?

Well, to put it simply, we thirst.

The disciples knew well what was lacking in what was called "religious" in their day. When Jesus said to them "follow me," they jumped. Their spirits were thirsty to know the living God. So are we.

Understand, the disciples were not looking to follow one guru after another. These were not men on a journey to find themselves. And they certainly are not likely to follow one whose only claim was to be a good magician.

"What concern is this lack of wine to you or to me?" On the one hand, he disciples must wonder what this wedding has to do with them. On the other hand, their souls cry out, "everything!" "We thirst! Show us, dear Jesus, how we might again connect with the living God."

Jesus goes on to say something that sounds like a cryptic excuse. He says, "My hour has not yet come." Let's use instant reply and slow down time. If we look closely enough we just might see that Jesus pauses for a moment before he speaks these words. Watch as he turns his attention to the six stone jars used for the religious rites of purification. Jars, which once held 20 or 30 gallons of water, that are now empty. These jars, like the theological mountain the woman spoke of when she Jesus met at the well, separates people from God, keeps the impure out.

I imagine that it is when Jesus is standing, facing the lifeless, empty jars, that he muses "My time has not yet come." Indeed there is still something that is getting in the way of Jesus' revealing fully God's glory.

If we slow down the scene we discover this as the possible reason for why Mary doesn't hear Jesus' words as an excuse for inaction but, rather, as a reason for action. She says, "Do whatever he tells you." Mary knows Jesus is the force that stands against the gravity of a lifeless faith. Do whatever he tells you, she whispers behind the closed doors. You who know the wine has run out, you who thirst, do whatever he tells you.

In our 21<sup>st</sup> century lives we might as well admit that we often find it difficult to know exactly what it is that Jesus is asking us to do. It is surely more than being good to our friends and neighbors. That's too easy--as it was too easy to simply fill the purification jars with water. Without blinking an eye, we would agree to that.

However, Jesus asks more from the servants. He asks them to take some of the liquid inside the water jars used for washing to the chief steward so he might have a drink. Now this seems pretty crazy to me. If this is what Jesus means me to do, perhaps I don't want to obey.

And yet...yet...I thirst. And yet I know others thirst. And Good Friday was not too long ago...when Jesus was on the cross, when God was silent, we are told he cried out, "I thirst."

Do whatever he tells you.

Sometimes when our Christian souls are thirsty, we avoid Jesus rather than seeking him out. It is no accident that it is the lack of wine that defines the trouble in our scripture. Wine is that which, in communion, signifies Christ's life force, his blood. Avoiding Jesus just adds to our thirst.

Do whatever he tells you.

Richard Oberreiter, chair of Trustees, keeps encouraging us leaders to think big. I don't think I'm good at this yet. I'm used to thinking in terms of programs, getting busy, doing what can be done in the structures that exist today. Maybe, I think, I'll experiment, try something small, taste and see if it really works. It seems like a reasonable approach, one that allows me an escape.

Then I wonder...if the servants tasted, would they have known enough to know the wine was good? Would they have thrown it out before they ever took it to the steward?

Do whatever he tells you.

How do I know that the word I receive is from Jesus? How do we know it is Jesus who guides us and not some unmet psychological need that would be better handled in therapy? How do we decide when the walls are papered

with posters with scribbled ideas, which vision Jesus truly desires us, as a church, to have? The water is filled with the powder of ideas. The tension between competing visions is palpable. We can't do it all!

Perhaps you've guessed that we just had our lay leader retreat yesterday.

Yet, the question for the church is no different from that which you have for your own life, for your children's life, for your work, for your neighborhood, for this city, for your "call" to act in our world.

How do you know when the "call to action" you receive is from Jesus? Is there a way to drop a bit of Jesus soap onto the surface that the powder might fall to the bottom and we might see more clearly?

Timothy Owings in an exposition of John 2 writes "Jesus is the feast's only hope."

Jesus is the feast's only hope.

It is ironic how those in the other room don't know it. But we do.

The feast represents the joy of God sharing—communing--with God's people. We don't have to look far to find times when that feast, that joy, is in danger. There are people learning and speaking theologies that frankly kill the joy God intends for us. There are adults who lost faith long ago who content themselves with something less. The quest for perfection has, in too many cases, replaced the quest for communion with God.

How do we know that we are hearing Jesus clearly when we're called to do something as radical as giving bath water to a wine steward? We begin with prayer...pray every day. In prayer we learn the character of Jesus. John's gospel suggests another guideline. We know we are hearing Jesus clearly when we are called to do that which opens the way for someone to continue in the feast, to enter into the feast, to become part of God's celebration and part of God's holy and loving community. We know we should do whatever he tells us when what we do opens a door that will lead someone into communion, into a life in which they can connect deeply with God.

It may be that you are opening the door for yourself. Attending prayer 101, giving up a weekend that you might learn to pray, be reminded how to pray, is an opportunity for you to open the door for yourself, to connect again.

It may be you open the door for another. You may have someone in mind--one of those with whom God has called you to share your faith. You may receive word on what is lacking that is needed to connect them with God--and you do what Jesus tells you that they might enter the feast.

My friends, with Jesus, you will know what door needs to open. In prayer, you can see more clearly. 1

May Jesus show you and our church the way to turn our lives and other lives into ones blessed with Cana's wine.