



Mary and the Hour

TEXT
John 2:1-11

September 10, 2017 — Sermon by Rev. Tom Are, Jr.

For all of us, I think, there are people in our lives who inspire us in our faith journey. They are our teachers in the faith, those who encourage us; those who show us what it is to be a follower of Christ.

For me, one of these was Bob. I call him “Holy.” He lives in North Carolina, so when he answers my call, I just say, “Hey Holy.” He’s a pastor — the kind of pastor who never calls attention to himself; the kind of pastor who listens deeply and speaks with gracious wisdom.

When I completed seminary, he invited me to join his staff. I called my dad and said, “You know Bob. He’s invited me to be an associate pastor on his staff. What do you think?”

Dad said, “He might be a fool to take you, but you would surely be a fool not to go.” I served with him for three years. Bob took me in when I was as green as a spring lawn. I didn’t know what I didn’t know. He was generous with patience and with time and put me on a road in ministry that I would not have found apart from him. We are as different as silk and burlap — he was silk. He

wasn’t the only one, but he was among those who taught me that ministry is less about skill and more about love. He taught me not only about being a pastor, but about being a Christian.

Do you have people like that?

I think for most of us, maybe all of us, there are people who in moments or seasons have showed us what it means to be a disciple. To be a Christian takes a village.

I think this is not only true for us, but I think it was also true with Jesus. He encountered others who taught him how to be who he was called to be.

In this series, I want us to learn from some of his teachers. We will see what he learned from his father, Joseph. And from an unnamed Gentile woman, who surprises Jesus with both her faith and insight. There will be others as well, but first is his mother, Mary.

Our text is the wedding at Cana. It is here that Jesus performs his first miracle, or as John calls them, “signs.” I have to say, I can’t read this story literally. I have no difficulty believing that Jesus did miraculous things that people couldn’t understand or explain.

Most of Jesus’ miracles were about meeting human need: hunger, disease, injury. But John says that Jesus’ first sign was changing 120 to 180 gallons of water into wine just to keep a wedding reception going through the weekend. I don’t think that literally happened; I hope not, actually. But I do think this story is true.

Things did not go well at the wedding in Cana. I find some comfort in knowing that there is a long history of things going wrong at a wedding. It can happen sometime. But this was terrible. They ran out of wine. If you were at a wedding and there was no wine, I don’t know if your first thought might be, “Well, we better call Jesus,” but that’s what Mary does.

She tells Jesus, “They have no wine.”

He responds, “Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My hour has not yet come.”

Almost as if she is ignoring him, she tells the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” And then after saying he can’t do anything about this, or won’t do anything about this, or maybe shouldn’t do anything about this — almost as if he can’t

help himself — he changes water into an abundance of fine wine. Most people didn't even notice, but the steward says, "Wow, this is the best." And the disciples beheld his glory.

What's this about?

This story is like a movie trailer where scene after scene drops on top of each other, because here John collects a number of important terms that will be used throughout the gospel: *sign, glory, the third day, water, wine* and, most importantly, "*the hour.*" It will take the full length gospel to fully understand it all, but let me just make two observations: one about Mary and one about wine and the hour.

Mary says, "Jesus, they have no wine."

"Woman, what does that have to do with you and me? My hour has not come."

What every interpreter wants to know is the tone of voice here. Is it exasperation ... *Motherrrrrrr?* Or whining ... *Mooooommmm?* Or defensiveness ... *Why are you telling me? I didn't drink all the wine. What does that have to do with me?* Or is Jesus saying, "This isn't important. Mom, please ... my hour has not come."

Being a conversation between a mother and son, it could be any of these or all of these. It's hard to tell, but we know this: In John's gospel, the "hour" refers to Jesus' death and resurrection. Or even more on target, it refers to his purpose: He is here to save the world, not be a bartender at a wedding. *Mom ... please. I*

have more important things to do with my time.

My daughter was home this spring because the Presbyterian Women invited her to speak at their luncheon (thank you for that). Sarah spoke on this passage, and Sarah interprets that Mary nudges Jesus to do what Jesus does. She encourages him, inspires him, just nudges him a bit to be who he is supposed to be in this moment.

I think Sarah is right. After saying he can't or he won't, or maybe he shouldn't, he does. And folks say *glory*.

It helps to know this. Both wine and weddings are often biblical symbols or metaphors for God's promised day. Both weddings and wine are metaphors for that holy promise that the day will come when all that is wrong in you and in me and in the world will be made right.

New Testament scholar Gail O'Day wrote: In the Old Testament, an abundance of good wine is a ... symbol ... of the joyous arrival of God's new age.¹

Beverly Gaventa, who was our most recent visiting scholar, once said, "Wine is the biblical symbol of the joyous celebration of our connection to one another."

In other words, when there is wine in the Bible, there is joy because God is making things right with us.

To say they had no wine is not a comment about an empty glass; it's a comment about an empty heart. And this is at a wedding. A wedding is one place where you should expect

there to be joy — to be a joyous celebration of our connection to one another. They are at a wedding, and they have no joy. I have been at weddings where things didn't go perfectly. But can you imagine a wedding with no joy? There could be nothing worse.

Mary says, "They have no wine."

"Woman, my hour has not come."

Okay, that's right. It's not your hour, but you can still do what you can do today. It may not be time for God's promised day, but if that day is coming, it ought to influence how you live today. She nudges him.

In the midst of a world that is not right, Jesus brings joy. It's not everything, but when we can find joy in simply being human together, it's not nothing, and some might even find it to be miraculous.

This is a great story that tells the truth of who Jesus is.

So, what does this mean for you this week? If I understand the text, it says we live in a world that often falls apart, like a wedding with no joy. Instead of finding joy in being human together, we are divided; we are afraid; we are alone; we are suspicious; we magnify difference and diminish commonality. And in a world like that, hearts can be as empty as a glass with no wine.

So maybe we should be intentional about making a little wine, about finding joy in simply being human together.

I, like all of you, am thinking about my family and

friends, and a congregation that I love, who are all in Florida today. We know that many will lose their homes. We fear some may lose their lives. And this comes on the heels of the worst rain event on record that laid siege to Houston last week.

Our church and others will respond with donations, and many others will as well. These gifts will assist the churches in Houston and in Florida to be better at being the church in their own communities, helping real people with real needs. Cleanup and rebuilding will take a decade or more, and in some places, like we saw in New Orleans, things will never come back.

Some will say it's tragic. Others will say it is more complicated than that, as the scientific community says this is the kind of weather we should expect to experience with more frequency and severity as the climate changes. There is all of that. And it is more than discouraging.

But we will also see a little wine being made — some joy in just being human together. People of good will will help their neighbors, and even complete strangers. And they will find joy in doing so. And when they do, they won't worry about whether they are Presbyterian or Muslim. They won't ask if they are rich or poor, if they are Democrat or Republican. It will be enough to be human together.

It's not everything, not by a long shot. But it is what we should do today.

And it raises the question, "What would it take for that kind of joy, that kind of satisfaction, that kind of joy in being human together to occur without a crisis prompting it?" What would it take for people of different races and ages and faiths and nationalities and political persuasions to remember that we are all human first, and all those other things second, and to find joy in being human together.

To live that way ... it's hard to tell if that would be a miracle, or if it would just be what happens if we live today like we are living toward God's promised day.

She said, "They have no wine."

He said, "Woman, my hour has not yet come."

I know. But if you believe it is going to come someday, then that should inspire you to do something today.

¹Gail O'Day, *The Gospel of John: New Interpreter's Bible* (1995), p. 537

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.