

January 16, 2022 Second Sunday of Epiphany

Jesus' first miracle is so ordinary.

It's not ordinary, of course, in that it's not a miracle. It's not like just anybody could turn water into wine on a whim.

But it's not an obvious world changer. It involves no healing of the sick or dying as others do. It's more booze for the tipsy, not loaves and fishes for the hungry. It happens at a little country wedding of a couple not important enough to name check. It seems to be prompted by a simple bit of banter between a reluctant Jesus and his insistent mother.

It's a miracle, yes, but John calls it a sign. And a sign points to something greater than itself.

The gospel's signs indicate who Jesus is and what is significant about him.

With this sign, we can see Jesus providing more than enough. It's surely more than enough wine for however many

guests are present, estimable at 150 to 175 gallons by modern measurement. It's definitely more than valuable enough for the circumstances, as the chief steward attests to. An excellent quality wine in that quantity could run up a \$135,000 tab in today's accounting.

It's not clear what Mary expects when she tells her son the party has gone dry. This isn't a life-or-death situation but *it is* an emergency in terms of the reputation of the up-until-this-point presumably happy couple and their families. Given the cultural emphasis and expectations, this is a huge embarrassment in the making and could taint the memory of their celebration for the rest of their lives. It's certainly a setting off on the wrong foot to say the very least. Mary knows Jesus can fix this somehow but I still don't think she expects quite such a lavish and supernatural solution.

Though in setting up his miraculous sign, Jesus *sets up* the ordinary to be extraordinary. He looks to the jars that

held water for ritual purification under the Jewish law, part of practice that is second nature in the lives of common people. He will change what contains the elements necessary for doing one's duty and meeting one's obligation. He will fill them to the brim with what will come to represent his blood shed when his hour has undoubtedly and unambiguously come.

Ordinary but unspoken is the work that goes into this performance. Jesus in this instance is not the one who does the heavy lifting. At least not literally, anyway. It's not as if the servants who fill the jars at his command just have to turn on the faucet or hose and let 'er rip. The jars would have had to have been carried to the nearest well, which may not have been all that near. And when full, they would have weighed roughly a hundred and fifty pounds.

Perhaps there is a glimpse here of what it is like to follow Jesus. There is work to be done. It isn't glamorous. It

won't make a name for you, as it didn't for those wedding servants. But we do it. We help as God asks for the benefit of our neighbors in need. And we don't necessarily know how God is going to make it work but God does. And we get to witness it, take part in it and be let in on the secret. The secret that God shows up in mysterious and beautiful ways in unexpected places. We get a story to tell the rest of our lives just as those strong essential workers did.

We get to see that God doesn't run out of the very best for those in need of God's salvation, God's love, God's abundance, provision, grace, any of it. There is not a watered-down version that you get if you come late to the party or if you draw too much too soon. With God, it gets better.

But sometimes we have to come to the end of our own apparent resources and ability to fix things first. Mary, interestingly, did not come when the wine was looking a little

low or even when it was running out, but when there is no wine. We like to wait until we have no other option to ask God to get involved.

That we should see this merciful and lavish blessing by Jesus in ordinary, everyday life should inspire us for when the more extraordinary, challenging circumstances that come along. Yes, those who are in need of healing will come into our paths. We will get hit in the face with the harsh realities of poverty, racism, sexism, addiction, violence and the consequences of such things. We will be challenged to stand up, especially when we have let conditions fester and devolve to a point where it seems like there isn't hope to turn things around, to make a better life for people whom God loves immensely and asks us to love, too. We will be hesitant to stick our necks out ... but we have been shown this sign. This sign and many more that Jesus is with us when we come up against need, great and small.

We don't have to be daunted by, uh oh, we have run out. That we aren't enough on our own. We are made to be in community and in solidarity with those who need to be uplifted from what sin and brokenness have brought down upon those who are made to feel empty. We have been filled with good things by God's own doing. It's work to carry even what is good in abundance but it's the kind of work that builds up a heavenly reign, a light that shines through when everything else is a gloomy fog.

Our cup of blessing has not run out. It does not run out. So we are free and we are encouraged to pour from that cup as if it were a barrel, as if God has more where that came from. Because God does. And that's what changes the world.

Amen.