

“One Hundred Eighty Gallons”

Pastor Andy CastroLang

January 17, 2016

Scripture:

John 2:1-11 (NRSV)

The Wedding at Cana

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, ‘Fill the jars with water.’ And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, ‘Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.’ So they took it. 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 good wine until now.’ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

The Sermon:

There is something wonderful about a story like this!

Unexpected wine!

Really fine wine, too!

180 gallons of wine to extend the party!

A wedding is a celebration no matter where you go in the world. And in many places in the world the food and drink flow for hours and hours, or even days.

So it was in the world of Jesus. And what an embarrassment and what a sadness when all the partygoers realize that the party is ending too soon!
We all know that sooner or later, every party must end...but not yet, not yet! There is more dancing, and there is more snacking and drinking and jokes to tell and stories to share...a couple more speeches from family and friends.

Little children often collapse into tears when they are told the party is over...a temper tantrum over the end of the fun, the excitement, the high energy and buzz.

Whether it is in the ancient world of Jesus, or my granddaughters first birthday party...we all love a party, and we all hate to see it end.

So Jesus' mother has the briefest of chats with her son. And he, well, he thinks about it.

And then, in the first of the seven miracles, the seven signs of Jesus in the gospel of John...Jesus does the unimaginable.

180 gallons of wine to extend the party! Woohoo!

What are you to make of this? Well, first, get your 21st century analytical hat off, don't ask HOW did he do that...ask WHY did he do that?!

In my seminary class when this story was discussed I found some of my classmates disgusted over the waste of a miracle on *wine*, on people getting drunk. Nobody's life was saved, nobody was exorcised of demons. He just helped the groom avoid embarrassment. He gave everybody at that wedding a chance to indulge themselves.

Oh yes!

Wonderful things are happening in this story of the first of Jesus' miracles: Jesus always points toward the Father, our Creator, when he speaks, when he works his wonders. What are we to think when Jesus, the Chosen Son of the Creator Father, makes 180 gallons of wine? Again, WHY did he do this?

To show us the Father... and this is what I infer about my Creator/Father:

1. God is not stingy. That is certain.
2. God likes a party. That is certain.
3. God celebrates community. That is certain.

4. God gives in abundance, far more than we can expect or imagine. Cana in Galilee is a small town these days, and we are pretty certain it was a very small town in the time of Jesus. 180 gallons of wine is WAAAYYY more than that tiny village needed, or expected.
5. God in Jesus is extraordinarily gracious. The wine is not bought, not earned...it is given as gift, and it is a choice wine, an excellent wine, a precious gift. This is not \$5-a-bottle wine!

Who can imagine God in this way? There is no ferocious judgment here. There is no condemnation of broken humanity here. No scorn at our small lives, our endless struggles. Who can imagine the love of God so big, so broad? Jesus does. Jesus can. Jesus will show, as the prophets of old showed, the beauty of God, the joy of God.

BUT: "If it were easy to follow Jesus, everyone would do it". So it has been said.

- It is not easy to let go of a God of judgment and wrath; either against ourselves, or especially against our enemies.
- It is not easy to imagine a world of God's creating that does not reward us based on our hard work, our righteousness, or our repentance. And not just our own righteousness, but we like to test other people's righteousness, and repentance and hard work too.
- It is not easy to imagine a world where we are called to sit down at a banquet with the world and be happy and generous because this life is meant to be a party for the whole of creation. It is easier to despair. It is easier to be a cynic. It is easier to be selfish. It is easier to be fearful.
- It is not easy to imagine how to build beyond the walls of hatred and fear, so that we can ALL sit down, at the party, with brothers and sisters of all kinds and all places.

Pastor Jan recently put up on her facebook page: "this life is not a competition. I hope we all make it."

Jesus, the astonishing son of God in this gospel, spells this out in the most counter intuitive way we can imagine, with a miracle of 180 gallons of fine wine for a small town wedding.

Inside this story is the deeper message of Jesus: We are **all** loved by God, God **wants us all to make it**. God wants us all to make it to the place of joy, community, celebration in peace and plenty.

The entire gospel of John, 21 chapters long, has seven signs, seven miracles. There are healings of the sick, and feeding of thousands, and sight to a blind man, and raising back

to life. Massively important and powerful miracles. As it was written in vs. 11: Jesus “reveals his glory” in his miracles.

And every time Jesus does this in a miracle, in a “sign”; there is a chance to say, “Yes”, to this one who shows us the glorious face of God. The “disciples believed in him”, the text tells us.

I believe in him too. I believe in his powerful message, in the glory of his life and his death and resurrection, in his giving us the Holy Spirit so we will never feel alone and afraid, even when I cannot see Jesus face to face.

This is the job of the gospel of John...to ask you...will you believe in him? Will you trust his message? Will you follow him? Will you trust the God whom he comes from, and speaks for?

The ultimate design of God, for human life, is a party.

No darkness, no suffering, not even death, should stop us from celebrating in peace, in plenty, in community, in profound gratitude.

If we want to be a church of Jesus, then we need to begin here, and now, in creating that place of peace, of community, of joy and of party.

In our every worship service, in our every meal downstairs, in every voting decision we make...we are to act out of trust in God’s overflowing generosity and unmerited grace. We are to share with stranger and friend, and let others experience the richness of God’s giving, through our sharing.

We are to be an unafraid, and joyous community, who trust in Jesus, who trust in God and live gladly in this world, ***throwing wedding parties everywhere we go!***

Come on Westminster, let’s do this!