

“What If We Run Dry?”
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January 16, 2022

1 Corinthians 12:1-11
John 2:1-11

As our Season of Epiphany continues— remembering that last week, the appearance of the Magi shed light on who Jesus is and was— the scriptures continue to shine light to help us reveal the identity and mission of Jesus.

So it's the third day, and there's no wine at the party. What happens when a wedding runs dry? It may not seem like a big deal, but according to the rules of middle eastern hospitality, it's a big deal. Weddings, which could go on for a week, relied on wine not just for the social lubricant aspect, but also simply because that is what people drank. When the wine stops flowing, the party's not going.

Of course this thinking isn't universally helpful. I know a number of people, including myself, who have been trying to cut down on alcohol intake, both for their health and also because pandemic drinking may have gotten out of hand. Dry January is a cultural trend with good reason, and in 2022, Oprah Magazine reports, 20% of Americans plan to participate in it. I wonder how that's going?

I respect that intentional practice of choosing abstinence from things that are not healthy. But what if you are feeling dry from that which is bringing you connection, joy, and life? What if you have a longing that is much deeper than what alcohol can provide?

On this Martin Luther King remembrance Sunday, we remember a man who had a longing, a thirst, for justice. Like the prophet Amos who said, “Let waters roll down like justice, and righteousness like an everlasting stream!” King helped a nation realize how thirsty it was for racial and economic justice. We are still thirsty.

Thirst has been a way to separate the haves from the have nots. Think about the time when water fountains were segregated in many parts of this country. Remember that the government looked away while Flint, Michigan knowingly pumped water tainted by lead and other contaminants through the faucets of its black residents. Today in the lands where Jesus himself once walked, control of and access to water allows land on one side of the wall to flourish, and the other side to remain in a state of perpetual drought.

The fact that this particular wedding party ran out of wine may have suggested three things: one, is that the hosts were far from wealthy. There may have been servants for the event, but wine was so basic to any gathering that an event such as a wedding would have been planned for, with barrels of wine stored in preparation, unless the hosts simply could not afford such a

provision. Further, guests of the party also would have been expected to have brought wine, too. So running out revealed both the shortcomings of the hosts, and of the guests. Most importantly, people were thirsty.

Mary wasn't having it. We can guess her connection to the wedding party was close, if she was poking around behind the scenes with the servants. Jesus was there in no official capacity— he seemed simply ready to enjoy the festivities, wine or no wine, judging from his nonchalant response to his mother.

But his mother Mary saw this moment as a *kairos* moment— that is, not a moment of regular time, but as a moment of God time, infused with holy meaning. She also trusted that her mere mention of the problem would result in Jesus doing something about it, regardless of his reply, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." Mary knew that the hour was in fact his. Interestingly, in John's gospel, Jesus' mother is only mentioned in two stories— here, in the first of Jesus' public miracles, and at the foot of the cross as Jesus was dying. Both times he refers to her as "Woman." Scholars agree that this form of address showed intimacy, rather than how we would hear a man addressing someone in the opposite gender as "woman" today.

A couple of weeks ago, Larry Harris beautifully sang a touching song, "Mary Did You Know?"
Mary, did you know that your baby boy Would one day walk on water?
Mary, did you know that your baby boy Would save our sons and daughters?
and it is always powerful to hear Larry's baritone crescendo
Did you know that your baby boy Has come to make you new;
This Child that you delivered Will soon deliver you?

Larry's amazing singing aside, I was entertained by a meme that has been floating around in recent times— I think I first saw it a couple of Christmases ago: "Of course, Mary knew!" And last year, I saw there were actually lyrics put to the meme:

*"Yes, Mary knew, that her baby boy would one day rule the nations.
Yes, Mary knew, that her baby boy was Lord of all creation.
Yes, she knew! Read Luke 1, you fool, she sang about it then.
It helps, if when you're reading, you listen to the WOMEN!"*

It turns out that Jesus listened to Mary without her even needing to ask him. He instructed the stewards to take 6 stone jars, which had been meant for Jewish purification rites, and fill them with water. The number six is important here, for Genesis reports 6 days of God's creation, leading to the 7th day--a holy day of Sabbath rest. When the steward drew the water out of the jars, it had turned to wine-- and not just any wine; the wine was so fine, that it fooled the steward into thinking that they had mistakenly used the inferior wine at the start, and the best wine when everyone was too tipsy to appreciate the difference. Then Jesus revealed his glory, and people believed in him. It was the first of his miracles.

What might this miracle mean for us? Is it merely to point out Jesus' awesomeness, to prove his divine powers? I suggest this story has more on tap for us than that— even today, especially today, in this third winter of a pandemic. These are times when I imagine some of you feel dry, like there is nothing left for yourself, and nothing left, not one drop, to offer the world. Maybe you have wondered, what if this is it? What if things just don't get better?

I think that's one place this gospel has something to preach for you, for me. You are, we are partners in God's ever-unfolding part of creation. Although science now tells us there is more to the story, our biblical tradition that shows us creation unfolding in 6 days; then there is a 7th day for rest. The gospel gives us 6 jars of wine, and leaves us reminded of that seventh day-- the holiest, when there is rest. So if there is a chance for you to rest, take it. Allow yourself to be filled again.

Just as there is a 7th day for rest and renewal, there is a 3rd day for resurrection. John's gospel tells us this miracle in Cana happened on the third day, and what it brought was so much better than any ordinary wine. To find that best taste, we in the church must trust each other and trust God to offer what feels ordinary or even empty, and together make it **glorious**. It's an act of commitment and faith to look for that and find it in each other. Like Mary, who brought her concern to Jesus about the empty wine jars, this grace won't likely come unless you communicate about what is, and what is not available in your wine cellar.

When we can share what we see with a community of people God calls to serve, then miracles can take place. Notice that Mary saw there was no wine. But she did not put that burden on herself alone. She called in Jesus, and the help of the servants at the wedding. Jesus told the servants to fill the jars with water. And they filled them, to the brim. Interestingly, besides Mary, only the servants— the only people there to work and not party— are the only ones to directly witness what Jesus did. His first miracle was reserved for the working class to witness, even before the disciples saw or heard what he did. Those wedding servants are probably the ones who told the good news of that miracle, so that eventually it would get written down in John's gospel and known by us.

Paul says that in the church, the Body of Christ, there are many different gifts. Some speak wisdom, others speak knowledge, some heal, some perform miracles, others prophecy, some speak in tongues, others discern tongues. Some notice when the wine is empty, others haul water so that miracles can be performed. Some moan against injustice; others protest; and some create a vision for what can be. But no one does all the things on their own. Most of us are painfully aware of how limited our energy and gifts truly are. But when we bring them into the body of the church, we become so much more than the sum of our parts. We become the body of Christ. Our water is transformed into wine. Our emptiness becomes something that is full: It brings connection, joy, and new life.

Today is *kairos* moment— a moment infused with God. It is a day of connection. A day of joy. A day of new life for our church. I invite you to join me in bringing water into your worship space, as the reminder of baptism fills us again as we receive new members into the church.