

Rev. Lisa Schrott
July 3, 2022
John 2:1-11
The Sacred in the Ordinary: Water and Wine

The theme for our summer services through Labor Day will be the “The Sacred in the Ordinary.” Jesus’ taught his disciples using stories and parables about common elements and situations in their lives. In these stories, the ordinary was transformed into the sacred, and we get glimpses of how we can bring God’s kingdom to earth. We will look for ways our lives can be transformed by appreciating sacred moments in our everyday life. And we delve into how these passages can help us better understand the elements in our worship service. This morning we explore water and wine and the imagery of the “joyful feast of the people of God,” otherwise known as communion. Listen now to this word from the Gospel of John, chapter 2.

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 me and to you? 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 person in charge of the banquet.” So they took it. When the person in charge tasted the water that had become wine and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), that person 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. **This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.**

In her June 18th column, the syndicated advice columnist Amy Dickinson devoted her entire “Ask Amy” column to readers’ biggest wedding mishaps. Most of the incidents in the column, as well as in the over 500 comments, occurred, not surprisingly, at the reception. I won’t share how long I spent reading through them and chuckling to myself, but if you Google “Ask Amy” and “wedding mishaps” you too can while away an hour or two.

Mary GJ wrote, “We didn’t have a huge budget and didn’t want to spend our money on things that weren’t important to us, so we skipped the cake. Too many cakes aren’t very good, and the good ones cost a fortune. We saved not only the price of the cake, but didn’t have to rent the table, linens, plates, forks, extra server hours, etc.” Mary GJ, concluded by saying, “I waited 2 weeks, then started asking friends “Did you have

cake?" Everyone I asked, including my mother-in-law, said, "Yes!" "Did you like it?" "Yes, it was good!"¹

Now it is likely that those she asked were either being polite or had indulged in a little too much champagne and didn't remember. Or maybe Jesus showed up. Weddings, and wedding mishaps, are popular topics not just for the rom-com genre in Hollywood (from *A Philadelphia Story* to *My Best Friend's Wedding* to *Wedding Crashers*), but for most of the rest of us too. Want to make conversation with a pastor? Ask them about strange wedding requests and mishaps they've seen. The first wedding I officiated as a pastor was for a 90-year old groom and 86-year old bride. My homily was on how their wedding symbolized hope – especially appropriate as the wedding had to be postponed and rescheduled because of Hurricane Matthew. We eventually got them married, although they had to change reception locales because of hurricane damage to the restaurant they had initially chosen. They were good sports about all of it because they understood the deeper meaning of the day. Yes, wedding mishaps make great stories. And they help point us to the true significance of the ritual. It was no different in Jesus' day. A mishap at a wedding banquet in Cana of Galilee initiated Jesus' ministry, not only revealing something about who Jesus is to his disciples, but also giving us an image of the great banquet that await us in the Kingdom and an invitation to feast at this banquet when we come to the communion table.

Weddings are full of symbolism and this passage from the second chapter of John is no exception. Our passage opens with words that foreshadow the culmination of Jesus' ministry. "On the third day there was a wedding..." On the third day...for those who know the story of Jesus' death and resurrection, this reference to the "third day" would have immediately caught their attention. Buckle your seats folks, we are going to hear a resurrection story; a story about the birth of possibilities. Just prior to this story, in the end of chapter 1, Jesus called Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael to follow him and be his disciples. And now they are all together at wedding feast. And although Jesus initially resists, saying his time to reveal himself has not yet come, Jesus performs his first miracle – or sign – as it is referred to in the book of John. Jesus' ministry begins in a setting full of ritual and full of joy.

In Jesus' days, a wedding was a multi-day affair – often a week in length. The guest list was extensive – not just close friends and family, but far flung relatives and even the whole village. As theologian Cynthia Campbell notes, "It was a time of great joy and hope for the future. A new family is created, and existing families are being knit together into closer community. In addition to eating and drinking, there is music and dance, laughter and storytelling. A wedding feast is meant to be enjoyed."² Indeed! Campbell concludes her commentary on this passage by reminding us that this exuberant celebration is a sign of the inbreaking of God's reign. Or as others have noted it is a reminder of the extravagant abundance of God's love and grace. And from the earliest days of the church, this story of Jesus using an ordinary element – water – and transforming it into something sacred – wine – has provided meaning and context for communion or the Lord's Supper, one of the two sacraments we celebrate as Presbyterians. It expands the narrative, helping us to see this "joyful feast of the people of God" as the culmination of Jesus' ministry on earth and his death and resurrection.

¹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/advice/2022/06/18/ask-amy-biggest-wedding-mishaps/>

² Cynthia M. Campbell. *God's Abundant Table*. Witherspoon Press. 2011. p8.

Our understanding of the Lord's Supper has been very much shaped by the last supper Jesus shared with his disciples. We commemorate this somber event on Maundy Thursday and recognize its significance when we gather around the Table, sharing the story of that last emotional night Jesus spent with his disciples. We acknowledge in our liturgy that Jesus commanded us to eat this bread and drink from this cup in remembrance of him. Much like the Passover Seder is in remembrance of the exodus - God's saving act for the Hebrew people - we commemorate Jesus' ministry on earth and his death on the cross for our salvation. This act of salvation is central to our understanding of communion and is highlighted in the words of institution: "this cup is the new covenant sealed in my blood for the forgiveness of sins." We are invited to the table of grace.

And while the significance of the Last Supper is front and center as we celebrate the meal together, there are other meanings that Protestants confer to our celebration of the Lord's Supper. An important one is thanksgiving. The Greek word "eucharist" means thanksgiving, and a central element of our sacrament is the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving. Before we partake of the elements we give thanks, saying "Let us give thanks to God. It is right to give both thanks and praise."

We also acknowledge that communion is the work of the Holy Spirit. This is seen throughout the communion liturgy where we invite the Spirit to be present with us. The words that start our Great Prayer of Thanksgiving invoke the Holy Spirit: "The Lord be with you. And also with you. Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to God." It is the work of the Holy Spirit that allows us to lift up our hearts. For the reformed theologian John Calvin, this is where we encounter the spiritual presence of Christ. We are drawn up to Christ because the mystery of the Supper is a heavenly mystery. The Holy Spirit is also invoked in a special part of the Great Prayer of Thanksgiving known as the epiclesis. Towards the end of prayer, I will share language that asks God to pour out the Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts of bread and wine that they may be for us the body and blood of Christ and that we may be Christ's body for the world. We ask that by the Spirit we are not only united with Christ, we are also united with one another until we feast with Christ and with all the saints in the eternal realm of justice and peace."³

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we are not only united with Christ, we are united with each other. In the apostle Paul's writings he refers to the sharing of the bread and the cup as an act of *koinonia* or community, the root of our word for communion. In 1 Corinthians Paul gives us language for the "both/and" saying, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."⁴

We partake of one bread. We partake of one cup of blessing. We feast abundantly. I love this quote from the Rev. Robert Brearley: "Sometimes the church has forgotten that our Lord once attended a wedding feast and said yes to gladness and joy. Prompted by his earthly mother, Jesus turned water into wine to point us to his heavenly Father, a God who loves to hear the

³ From the Liturgy of the Eucharist. *PC(USA) Book of Common Worship, Westminster John Knox Press, 2018.* p.27

⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

laughter of people celebrating people. Sometimes the church has forgotten to live the joy of such revelation.”⁵

We are invited to live the joy of the revelation of God’s inbreaking into our lives. We are invited participate in a resurrection story; a story about the birth of possibilities. We are invited to a joyful feast, to come to the table and partake of *one bread*. We are invited to become a new family, created and knit together into closer community. The ordinary relationships we have—neighbors, colleagues, acquaintances we may nod to at the store, parents of our kid’s friends, strangers we share a pew with – these relationships become sacred when we gather at the table. Like the water transformed into wine, our relationships are transformed such that we who are many become one body. And we as individuals are transformed. The broken and breaking, the tired and aching, the puzzled and pondering are not just invited, we are welcomed with joy. In that welcome we are no longer alone. And we are called to invite others to feast with us.

On this Independence Day weekend, I think about Christ’s call to bring good news to the poor; to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor. I think about how these words are echoed in the poem “The New Colossus” by Emma Lazarus written in tribute of found on the Statue of Liberty:

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"⁶

We lift our lamps in welcome. We share one bread and a common cup. We recognize strangers as siblings in Christ. We celebrate that on the third day, the ordinary became sacred. Friends, how can we not be joyful at this table of grace and gratitude! Join me in prayer...

⁵ Robert M. Brearley. John 2:1-11. *Feasting on the Word. Year C. Volume 1*. Ed. By David L. Bartlett and Barbard Brown-Taylor. Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.

⁶ The full text can be found online at <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46550/the-new-colossus>