

2019 01 20 – Sacred Feasting

John 2:1-11

Over the past week I have found myself repeating the phrase, “It’s only the middle of January, but Christmas seems so far away.” Now that the busyness of the New Year is in full swing, it is easy to forget that the holiday season even happened. Except maybe for the fact that some of our clothes don’t fit quite as well as they did a month or two ago. Christmas is a time for gathering with family and friends, for going to concerts and recitals, for drinking and eating the rich and wonderful fare that we tend to avoid over the rest of the year. It’s a time for feasting, feasting on food, fellowship and fun.

My Christmas season this year was amped up one more notch because it included a family wedding. On December 29th I was in Vancouver celebrating with my nephew, Joel and his new wife, Elizabeth. Food was, of course, a central component of the event. On Friday evening my immediate family gathered at a local restaurant for supper and were together again for a big breakfast. The wedding ceremony went off without a hitch and then there was a light lunch to tide us over until the reception. When we arrived at the golf and country club, we were greeted with hot, cheesy hors d'oeuvres, and then sat down to an amazing buffet meal that included poached salmon, stuffed chicken and an exquisite roast of beef. There was wine at the table and tickets for the bar. There were desserts for all tastes and even a candy buffet in case your sweet tooth was not yet satisfied. It was a lavish and an abundant feast.

No doubt this celebration had some similarities to the one that Mary, Jesus and his disciples experienced in Cana nearly 2000 years ago. Of course, Jewish weddings in the first century usually lasted a week. So it's possible that this one had been going on for a few days before Mary took her son aside to tell him the bad news. "They have no wine," she said. Jesus' responded by saying, "Mother, what does that have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." Theologians have debated for centuries over Jesus' words: Was he really being rude to his mother? What did he mean by saying, "My hour has not yet come?" Was he referring to his fledgling ministry or was this the author's way of foreshadowing Jesus' death? In truth, there is no way of knowing the "correct" answer to any of these questions. But Mary, knowing her son, just ignored his negative response and assumed he is going to fix their hosts' embarrassing problem. She turned to those who were waiting on tables and said, "Do whatever he tells you."

It is at this point that Jesus takes control. He notices six stone water jars ready to be used for the Jewish ceremonial washings that were a part of their daily existence. Since some of the water had probably already been used by the wedding guests, Jesus tells the servers to fill the jars with water. These were not counter-top jars, they were the size of large barrels. Each one held fifteen to twenty-five gallons of water. So we're talking about a total of somewhere between 90 and 150 gallon of water.

The next thing we know, Jesus is telling the servers to draw some of the water out of the jars to take it to the caterer, the person in charge of the food. The caterer tastes the beverage and is so amazed with the wine that he is drinking

that he interrupts the bride and the groom to compliment them on saving the best wine until last! Thanks to Jesus, the party has been revived and is even better than before. This feast is not even close to ending!

This a great story, but it leaves us with a nagging question. What does it have to do with Jesus' ministry? Why did the author of the Gospel of John place this story at the beginning of his gospel? And what does it have to do with us?

In fact, many would argue that Jesus' first miracle was an incredibly wasteful act. Who needs that much wine anyway? Jesus spent the rest of his ministry healing, teaching and feeding people who were sick, poor and hungry. He taught us that we should love our neighbours and share what we have with each other. He called the rich, the elite, the Pharisees and the High Priests, hypocrites and thieves. There were lots of better ways to use that water, there were lots of better ways to use the gifts that Jesus had been given. So why would he turn over 100 gallons of water into wine?

Well like us the people in first century Galilee lived in a world of scarcity. They lived in a time when taxes were high, people could barely make a living, farmers were losing their land because of debt, and many widows, orphans and those who were mentally ill lived as beggars on the street. Like us they lived in a world where some were rich and some were poor, where some had more than enough and some were starving.

They lived in a world where people were afraid. People, especially the rich, were afraid of not having enough. They were afraid that someone was going to come along and take what they had. They lived in a world where people were so afraid of not having enough that they built stone walls around their temples and walls with armed guards around their cities.

In Canada and more specifically, here in Swift Current, most of live relatively comfortable lives and yet we live in a society that tells us we don't have enough and that we are not enough. We are bombarded with advertisements that suggest things we can buy, places we can go and ways we can improve our faces and are bodies so that we can have and be more. We elect political leaders who tell us that they are able to make us great again, as if we are not already good enough. We buy all kinds of stuff to put in our homes and when they are filled to overflowing, we buy bigger houses so we can prove to our neighbours and ourselves that we are enough.

And like the people of first century Galilee, we live in a world where the rich and powerful want to build walls to protect their wealth. This week there was an excellent article on the CBC website called *Walled world: Lessons from Europe's border barriers*. This article talks about walls that have already been built in other parts of the world and it questions their effectiveness and notes their negative impact on those who are fleeing oppression. When the rich and the middle class get caught up with protecting what they have, it's those who are already on the margins who suffer. <https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/a-world-of-walls-europes-lessons-in-border-barriers>

I believe that this story about Jesus turning water into wine was included at the beginning of John's gospel because it tells us a different story. The wedding at Cana is a story of abundance. It is a story about a celebration of love. It is a story of a week-long feast. It is a story of gallons of water turned into wine. It is a story of lavish hospitality. It is Jesus' story for us.

Jesus came into the world to tell us and to show us that God's grace is both lavish and abundant. Jesus came into the world to tell us that we already have enough, that we already are enough. We are enough because we are the beloved children of God. We are enough because we have all been given what we need to live meaningful lives in God's kingdom. So often, like the caterer we don't even realize what we have, so often we don't even know that what we think is water, is actually wine. We don't realize that what we have is already more than enough.

Jesus is calling us to live our lives from a place of abundance. First we are called to own the fact that God's amazing grace, God's unconditional love and forgiveness is ours for the taking. We already have it, we just have to turn to God and own it. And then we are called to share that love with others. We are called to open ourselves to the needs of those around us and to join with them in mutual relationships of trust and love. We are called to tear down our walls. We are called to celebrate, to join in the sacred feast of abundant love. Jesus is calling us to the banquet, the banquet of love.