

FINE!

SHERARD EDINGTON

John 2:1-11

As disciples of Jesus Christ, a question that we ask ourselves is this: What is our responsibility to give aid to other people? When we recognize that someone is in need, how far must we go? When do we interrupt our lives to reach out in assistance and compassion? The scriptures are clear on this—both the Old and New Testaments—that we are to love one another, and treat our neighbors as we would treat ourselves. However, are we always on duty or do we get time off? Can we ever clock out of caring?

Our reading today is found in the second chapter of the Gospel of John. John begins his gospel with his prologue, *In the beginning was the Word...* Then, he introduces John the Baptist and tells of Jesus' own baptism in the river. Immediately after that, Jesus calls his disciples.

Chapter 2 begins with Jesus attending a wedding in the town of Cana. Cana is in Galilee. Jesus' mother is there at the wedding as well, as are his disciples. They had all been invited. At some point, the wedding runs out of wine. Jesus' mother informs her son of this telling him, *They have no wine.*

Now, there is so much about this wedding that we don't know. Who were the bride and groom? Were they friends or family? Why was Jesus invited? Why was Jesus' mother concerned that the wine had run out? There are plenty of questions but precious few answers.

In that culture, a wedding was a significant event. The wedding feast would have lasted for several days. Wine, as a beverage, was central to the event. It would be the life blood of the celebration. To run out of wine would have been a tragedy. If there was no wine, then people were likely to leave and head home. It effectively signaled the death of the party.

When Mary informs Jesus that the wine has run dry, his question to her is, *Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?* It sounds harsh but he has a point. After all, they are merely guests at the party. They are bystanders. They are not responsible for the supplies. We can all appreciate this question.

What Jesus says after that is a bit more problematic. He states, *My hour has not yet come.* We have no idea what he means by this. His hour for what? When will that hour arrive? What is he waiting for? It does sound as if there is some larger plan to reveal Jesus to the world? Maybe that will be his hour.

A politician goes on a talk show and the host asks, “Are you running for president?” and the politician answers, “It’s not the time to talk about that?” Why isn’t it the time? If you are going to run, then say so. Why the song and dance? You are either running or you are not? Jesus is either savior or he is not. The “hour” is not important. It takes his mother to remind him of his responsibility.

Typical of a mother, she ignores his protests and instructs the servants, *Do whatever he tells you.*

At this wedding there are six stone water jars. We are told that each of these jars could hold twenty or thirty gallons. To visualize this, think of a 55-gallon drum cut in half. These jars were there to be used for the Jewish rites of purification. This sounds elaborate but really, these jars were present simply for the guests to have water for the ritual washing of hands before eating. This was not for hygiene but for the ritual removal of sins and guilt. I would imagine that the jars were brought in for the occasion.

Jesus instructs the servants to *Fill the jars with water.* And they do. He then says, *Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.* And they comply. Although, they had topped off the vats with plain water, what they draw out is wine. The steward (who I imagine is the party planner) does not know the origin of this wine. When he tastes it he is astonished. He goes to the bridegroom and compliments him saying, *Everyone [else] 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.*

We don’t know how Jesus converted the water to wine.

Have you ever wondered why this story is included in John’s gospel. It’s rather superficial, isn’t it. Running out of wine at a wedding is not the end of the world. No one was going to die, it wasn’t an international incident, wars would not be fought over a shortage of chardonnay. So, when Jesus’ mother tells him to do something, why did he bother?

Well, it would have been important to the bride and the groom and their families. It could be a socially embarrassing moment. Running out of wine at the wedding is not the way that they would want their marriage to begin; it is not how they would want to start their new life together. That is the sort of *faux pas* could haunt a family forever. Imagine this: the couple has been married a few years and are dining at the home of friends and one of the guests at the table would laugh and say, “Hey, I brought extra wine. Don’t want to run out, you know.” Or they are at the local tavern and the bartender jokes, “Sorry, we ran out of wine. Only seems to happen when you come here.” Or when at the wine store, the cashier may say, “Are you sure you got enough, wink wink?” And at school, when there is a book report due, their kids always seem to get assigned *The Grapes of Wrath*. I joke, but there is

a lot on the line here. A wedding in Cana may not be important to the world but it is important to those involved. We may not be able to love the world but we can certainly love our neighbors.

This story is not just about wine and weddings. It is about much more. First of all, it is about abundance. When God is present in our world, life flows without ceasing. There is no scarcity of what God brings—life, love, mercy, light. God is the origin of these things and they are inexhaustible. At the wedding, Jesus brings an unending flow of wine—the life blood of the party. As disciples of Christ, as servants, we can bring an unending flow of compassion to those around us.

The story tells us something else, as well. When Jesus comes into the world, the world changes. We are no longer saddled with old wine; we drink from a new cup, wine that better than good. It is the fine wine.

But one more thing. Go back to the jars of water. These were brought to be used for the purification ritual. All the guests had passed by them and washed off their sins. These vats were now quite literally vats of sin. And yet, Jesus uses them to make something new, to bring the finest wine into the world. Jesus takes the polluted, the impure, the filthy, and creates something fine. That is us.

Amen.