

Abundant Love  
John 2:1-11

My husband Patrick and I were driving our youngest daughter, Brigid, home from basketball practice late last week. He and I were talking about this passage, the many different things John seems to want to convey to his readers in these 11 verses, but also through the whole of the gospel. We had focused in on the brief conversation between Mary and Jesus: Mary's blunt and seemingly expectant statement to her son, and Jesus' blunt and curious response. Brigid was listening to this, and somewhere in the midst of the conversation she said, 'Jesus should not have spoken to his mother like that ' I mean I know he's the son of God and all ' but she's his mother!' She went on to say, 'after all, in the ten commandments it says, 'obey your parents.' If MOM had been his mother, she would not have let him get away with that.' I'm not quite sure what that last part was all about, and am a little hesitant to explore it too deeply. However, I think she put her finger precisely on one of the pieces of this event which is a bit puzzling! A lot of what puzzles us has to do with differences in time, culture and language: how we talk to one another and how we hear through our own circumstances.

I want to take you back a few weeks, just for a moment, to Christmas Eve, at which time we read from the second chapter of Luke, and heard the angel's announcement to the shepherds in the fields:

'Do not be afraid, for see ' I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.' Luke 2:10-11

Luke tells us that after they heard this they went to the stable and found Mary, Joseph and Jesus. The shepherds told them all that they'd heard from the angel. And then Luke tells us that Mary 'treasured' these words and 'pondered' them in her heart.

For three plus decades Mary treasured and pondered these words and probably much, much more, in her heart, but the first time we hear about Mary from John, she's telling Jesus that the wine has run out at this wedding!

Weddings were pretty important events that often went on for 7 days. It was an exciting time and an important time for the host who would have been responsible for making sure that there was enough food and drink for everybody - the whole time. And since wine was very much a part of the regular diet of the people, not having enough was potentially disastrous for the host and his family. Being a good host was huge, and a function as important as a wedding that turned sour, would stay with that family a long time. Mary's simple statement to Jesus, seems to carry a lot of concern for the well being of the hosts of this wedding at which she and Jesus are guests.

At the same time, the image of good sweet wine flowing freely and abundantly is one of the many ways that the prophets described and offered hope to the people of Israel in times of despair. As they sat in exile away from their homes, away from the temple - far

from, they felt, the presence of God the prophets assured them of a better time to come. The Prophet Amos says in the last verses of the book:

The time is surely coming, says the Lord, when the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine. 9:13-14

Mary would have been very familiar with these promises - with these words of hope and assurance and the image of wine that promised hope for the people of God. 'They have no wine,' says Mary who has pondered and treasured the words of the angel in her heart and who has known all along that Jesus is more than her son.

Jesus' response, which Brigid found understandably hard to get her mind around, seems abrupt ' even rude. Hard on our ears, these words, while they actually convey a level of respect, do serve to create a certain distance between Jesus and his Mary. Mary is his mother, after all ' but Mary needs him to be a Savior. 'A Savior who is the Messiah, the Lord,' as well.

Standing not too far from Jesus are six stone jars and John tells us a lot about these jars:

1. They hold water for ritual washing - which a Jewish family would use to pour water over their hands to wash away all that made them unclean as they went about the routine of a day so that as they ate they didn't put the uncleanness inside them;
2. They are made of stone - much less porous than pottery, and means that impurities are less likely to get into the water and so the water was as clean as it could possibly be;
3. Finally, John tells us that they hold between 20-30 gallons of water each - so they were fairly good sized.

John gives us a lot of detail about these jars and so we listen, because the detail gives us a clue that Jesus is about to do something important which is not ONLY about a beverage.

He tells the servants to fill the jars to the brim with water. Six jars holding between 20-30 gallons each = a lot of water. At this point, the words, 'Jesus turned water into wine,' roll easily off our lips: we've heard them, we've read them, we've said them. This is a miracle which stands apart:

\*perhaps for all of its' intriguing 'holy' features,

\*and also perhaps for what it doesn't seem to do: he doesn't heal or raise somebody instead he makes sure an important social event continues to go well; it's almost mundane!

When the steward tastes the wine, he's surprised to discover that it isn't the bad wine that's typically served in the latter days of a celebration (when people probably won't notice the difference!), but rather an excellent, even vintage wine. And not only is it good , there's a lot of it: between 120-180 gallons, or more than 50 cases of strong, pure wine. Because of its' strength, it likely would have been cut with water which would mean that there would be far more than needed to get the guests through the rest of the party. All the steward's expectations are confounded.

This kind of miracle of abundance is amazing to me, in no small part because I'm very inclined to fret and worry and to try to calculate just exactly what I'll need to get something done. If we're painting a room in the house, I'm the one that says 'do we really need to get 2 gallons of paint?' as if having an extra gallon of paint around our home of 5 people, 1 large dog and 3 cats might not come in handy!

But the abundance and the confounding of the steward say much more to us than that the celebration continued without a hitch; they points us straight to the heart of Jesus' ministry. The old rites of purification and ritual, the continual need to repeat that process of 'doing something' to become acceptable to God are fulfilled. The time for hope and joy which the prophets kept in front of the people of Israel in hard times was breaking into their world in a new way.

And the visual image we have of the amount and good quality of the wine remind us that God's love is abundant and flows freely. God provides the love that we need - but far more than we need; God comes to us in the mundane and ordinariness of life - but also in the holy and extraordinary moments.

God's love is boundless and complete. Finally John tells us:

*Jesus did this, the first of his signs in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*

Jesus revealed himself, the *new wine*, that fills to the brim the old way of approaching God. The miracle is there for the disciples – that they would believe in him. And the miracle is there for us – to deepen our faith in a God who loves us and comes to us in Jesus, the Christ. Amen.