

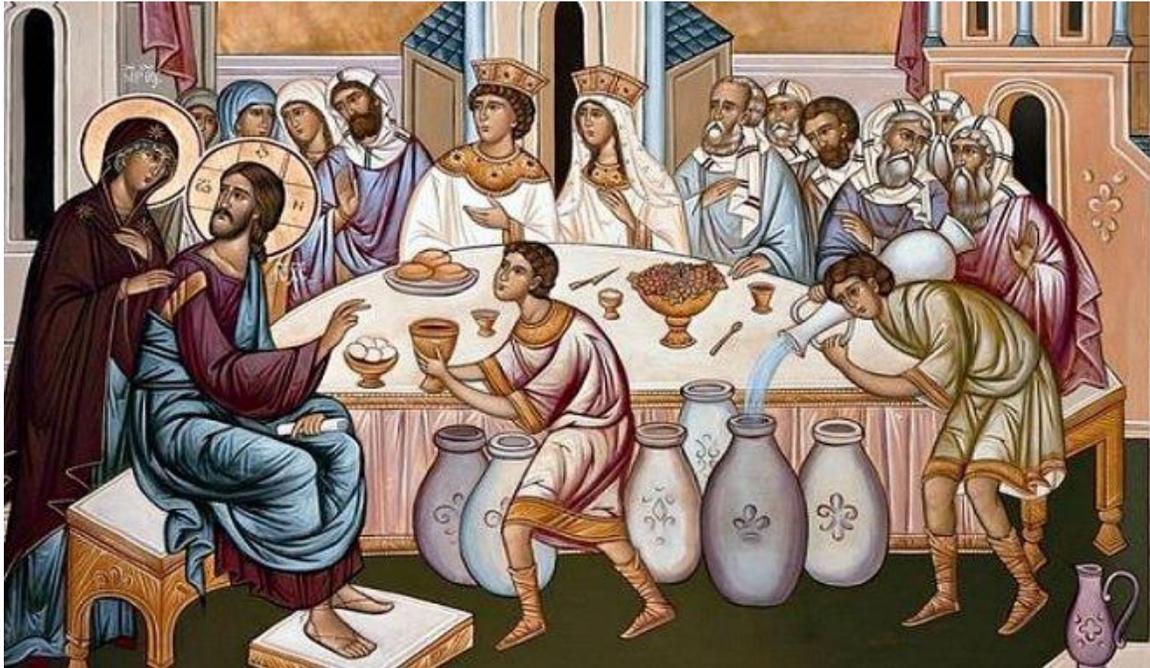
The Second Sunday After the Epiphany, January 23, 2022

“Partying with Jesus”

A Sermon based on John 2:1-11

By Rev. Ruth Ragovin

First Christian Church, 111 North Fifth St., Murray, KY



“Partying with Jesus”

John 2:1-11 (NRSV) ~ On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. ⁹When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰and 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.” ¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

“Jesus! We’ve got a big problem! They’ve run out of wine!” Jesus’ mother looked to him to help. This is the dilemma Jesus’ first disciples—Simon Peter and Andrew, Philip and Nathanael—got to observe Jesus responding to. Just three days earlier these four men had decided to put their trust in this new teacher, partially based on the recommendation of John the Baptist, but also because there was an inward pull. Jesus seemed to know things about them, to be able to look into their souls, to offer them hope. So off they had gone with him to a little village known as Cana in Galilee. Nathanael actually was from there. It was just a stone’s throw away from Nazareth, Jesus’ hometown.

There was a wedding in Cana. The scripture lets us know that Jesus’ mother Mary was there (even though in John’s Gospel they never give her a name). Tradition has it that she was present because it was actually her nephew John (the beloved disciple, the writer of the Gospel of John) who was getting married. Mary and John’s mother Salome were sisters.¹ So Jesus’ very first act after calling his first disciples is to go to the wedding celebration of what some ancient traditions hold is the Gospel writer John’s own wedding, which he himself is writing about in chapter two of John. That actually makes sense to me since Mary steps in and takes charge in a wedding celebration in ways she would not if she were merely a guest. She was family. So was Jesus.

Weddings back then were week-long events that began on Wednesdays and were held in the bridegroom’s home. They were major community events, the highlight of people’s lives with eating, drinking, and being merry. Wine was an essential part of Jewish celebrations, with the rabbis even saying that “*Without wine there is no joy.*”² Wine figured prominently in the Jewish tradition in their belief in the messianic banquet in the coming age, to which people would come from all nations, about which the prophet Isaiah said: ***On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-aged wines strained clear.*** (Isa 25:6) In an honor and shame-based culture in which hospitality was a sacred duty, running out of wine was a significant cause of shame and disgrace. Mary knew this. She wanted to help. So she turned to her son Jesus and says: “***They have no wine.***”⁴ ***And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.”*** (Jn 2:3-4)

¹ “There is an early set of Prefaces to the books of the New Testament called the Monarchian Prefaces which tell us that the bridegroom was one other than John himself, and that his mother was Salome, the sister of Mary.” William Barclay, *The Gospel of John, Vol 1*, p. 96.

² Barclay, p. 97.

Ouch! This is one of those hard scriptures. Jesus sounds kind of disrespectful to his mother here. Irritated even. “Why should we care that the wine has run out?” he seems to be saying. Who knows but perhaps Mary might have been a somewhat overbearing Jewish mama and he was pushing back against her. Of course, there is probably much lost in the translation here and we certainly can’t hear the tone in which Jesus said this. But we do know that Jesus isn’t just lazy or too busy to be bothered. He does give a clear reason for not trying to offer a solution to the disgrace over the wine running out. He says **“My hour has not yet come”** (Jn 2:4). This is significant. Jesus doesn’t feel ready to come out of the closet yet to reveal the totality of who he is. So he says something like: “Woman, it’s just not time for me to ‘come out’ in public to reveal to the world who I am.”

We discussed in our Wednesday evening Zoom gathering that “hour” should be understood in two different ways. There is the ‘hour’ with a small ‘h’ that means that it is not yet Jesus’ hour to start performing miracles (or what are known as ‘signs’) in John’s Gospel (John 7:6,8). His mother clearly knew that Jesus could conjure up some wine but he doesn’t feel ready to perform parlor tricks. Then there is the ‘Hour’ that begins with a capital ‘H,’ when Jesus is revealed as the Messiah as he prepares for his crucifixion, death, resurrection, and ultimate glorification (John 12:23; 17:1).

Who knows exactly what the interaction was after Jesus dismisses his mother’s request by saying “my hour has not yet come.” But Mary took charge of the situation, turned to the servants, and said: **“Do whatever he tells you”** (vs. 5). The ‘honor thy mother and father’ commandment must have kicked in because Jesus decides to take action and perform what is to be the first of 7 signs he performs in John’s Gospel. “Signs” should simply be understood to be actions that led people to believe he was the Son of God, the Messiah. So Jesus, with his disciples observing him, turns to the servants and says take those **“six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim”** (vs. 6-7). Note that the purpose of these huge stone jars is that they were to be used for the Jewish purification ritual of hand and foot washing. Now these jars are going to be used for something brand new! The servants filled these huge water jars with water to the brim. They then took a sample of it to the chief steward, who tasted it and was astonished! He had no idea where this excellent wine had come from and reached out to the bridegroom, praising him by saying: **“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.”**

One can only imagine, too, his delight, to discover that there were now some 120 (some say 180) additional gallons of wine to keep this party going for a very long time! What generous hosts they were! This was going to be some party! Wine in abundance! At a symbolic level this story tells us that Jesus' grace is more than enough for all! The scripture concludes by saying: ***“Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”*** Andrew, Simon Peter, Philip, and Nathanael already had decided to follow Jesus to see who he was. But now the deal was sealed. They believed in him!

This is how Jesus' ministry began. But what I want you to see today is that his mother Mary needed to nudge him into action. Mary is the catalyst to Jesus' extravagant generosity. Jesus was initially hesitant, holding back, reluctant. He wasn't sure that the time was right. But his mother Mary knew it was his moment to come out of the closet and reveal who he was. His mother wanted the wedding to be joyous! For there to be wine for everyone! For there to be abundance! Come on Jesus, let's get this party going! In the same way, God wants our lives and the final Messianic banquet, the wedding that we are all to prepare for and to which we are all invited, to be lavish and abundant and open to all. Come on Jesus, his mother said, let's get this party going! His mother kicked him out of the nest and he found his wings. And once that party really got going there was no stopping Jesus! From that moment on his ministry was marked by him being lavish in his hospitality with a generosity bordering on extravagance, radically inclusive, as he encouraged his disciples and us to do and be likewise.

Do you remember Jesus telling the crowds: ***“Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again”*** (Luke 6:30). Be lavishly generous to those who others think might not be deserving. Like the Prodigal Son who had squandered his inheritance on loose living, to which the father (a stand in for God the Father) responded by throwing a huge party for him and celebrating! (Lk 15: 22-24).

Jesus told his followers that there was no longer going to be us / them divisions. Everyone was to be invited to the banquet (both the earthly and the heavenly), saying, in the Parable of the Great Dinner (Luke 14:13-23): ***“Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame ... and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled”*** (Luke 14:21,23).

And there was to be more than enough for all at these gatherings. Not only did Jesus change 6 jars of purification water into some 120 gallons of wine, do you remember when he took two fish and five loaves of bread and with them fed 5,000 men

(not counting all the women and children), and ***“all ate and were filled; and they took up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve baskets full”*** (Mt 14:20).

Wine is an important symbol of God’s presence and the abundance God desires for us. Jesus’ ministry begins with his disciples in the Gospel of John around a fellowship table at a wedding by turning his turning water into wine, showing extravagant love and showering grace upon those around him. Jesus’ last shared time with all of his disciples ends with him around a table sharing wine and bread with them, an act that we know as the Last Supper, which we commemorate each week. Listen carefully to what Luke says about this:

14 When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. ... 17. Then he took a cup [of wine], and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; 18 for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” 19 Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 20 And he did the same with the cup [of wine] after supper, saying, “This cup [of wine] that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. (Luke 22:14,17-20)

Jesus’ hour, the one he had referred to when he changed water into wine at the wedding of Cana in Galilee, had finally come (cf. Jn 17:1). And just as he had begun his ministry by changing water into wine, at the end of his earthly ministry he used wine as a symbol of who he was and the great messianic banquet to which all are invited. And just as wine bookends Jesus’ ministry, so too do the same people bookend Jesus’ ministry. If it is true, as ancient sources say, that Jesus’ first sign was performed at the wedding in Cana of Jesus’ beloved disciple John, author of this Gospel, where his aunt Salome and mother Mary were, this was the same close circle who were with him in his final hours at the cross. It says in John:

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister [Salome], Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 ... and the disciple whom he loved [John] ... 28 when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” 29 A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (John 19:25-30)

After sharing the wine of joy with his disciples at the Last Supper, Jesus was forced to drink bitter wine before his death. But the fine wine of joy had the last word, for the tomb could not hold Jesus! His extravagant generosity and his grace that extended to everyone could not be contained! And almost as though he wanted to show his mother Mary that he understood and appreciated her nudge to him at the wedding at Cana to make sure there was enough for all, the author of John relates in his final story of the Gospel that the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples by the Sea of Tiberias shortly before ascending into the heavens. Just as at the wedding in Cana, Simon Peter was again present, as was Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, and John “the disciple whom Jesus loved.” Perhaps Andrew and Philip were there too! The disciples had been out fishing all night but had not caught anything, so a man standing on the shore called out to them. The scriptures say that: ⁶ *He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish.* ⁷ *That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!”* (John 21: 6-7)

Gallons of wine, baskets full of remaining bread, so many fish they could not haul them in! Symbols of lavish love, extravagant grace! Symbols of the abundant life that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ desires for us and wants us to introduce others to. And so today we take a moment to say thank you Mother Mary! Thank you for modeling this grace for Jesus and giving your son Jesus a little nudge and holding up God’s promise of abundance in our lives against any whispers of scarcity and loss. Thank you for showing your son Jesus how to throw a party! Can’t you just picture her looking at this group of Jesus and his disciples as they shared this meal of fish together and from afar catching Jesus’ eye and giving him the thumbs up!

[show video, Michael Card, “The Wedding,” 2:30 minutes]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrbeisqjrU>