

“Come and See God’s Glory”
Sermon by Oby Ballinger
Edina Morningside Community Church; January 14, 2018

John 2:1-11

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 you and to me? 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 chief steward.” So they took it. When 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 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.

Does anyone recognize this? Do you know what it is? A wine aerator! I forget who first taught me about this, but somewhere along the way I learned that there’s more to wine than just the taste after it comes out of the bottle or bag. Pouring through an aerator such as this adds oxygen to the wine, which changes how it tastes. With such intention and care, wine “blooms” with fully-developed fragrance and flavor. Javen makes fun of me for bothering with an aerator, but I’m certain that his taste remains unrefined. After years of using one, I find it disappointing to drink non-aerated wine, because it seems to forego the potential in the glass. Admittedly, this is a silly, first-world gadget. But I love the way it makes even common table wine taste like a rare and complex vintage, using nothing but air and a little bit of time. It’s delightful to discover extraordinary potential in the ordinary things of life.

Jesus has a knack for this sort of thing, revealing the extraordinary in the everyday. Today we see him at a wedding with his mother and the first disciples. I imagine the noise of a crowded, festive room, and the disappointment that starts to cover the faces of party guests when they realize that the wine is all gone. Jesus’ mother pushes him—against his wishes—to do something. She knows he’s got gifts for this sort of thing, even if he doesn’t believe the time is right. Still, he gives directions, servants fill empty stone jars with water, and the extraordinary wine that results from this water is enough to amaze the chief steward and the relieved bridegroom. Jesus works through what is ordinary—what’s more ordinary than water? —to achieve the extraordinary. Like a divine aerator, he reveals God’s glory in that which is commonplace. What results is far superior to what was served before. This is the first of Jesus’ signs, in the language of John’s gospel. Such signs convey proof of Jesus’ divinity, pointing the way for keen observers to recognize God on earth in human form. He reveals the joyful wine of divine abundance in place of human scarcity and dismay. There is more than enough to go around.

As I said, Jesus has a knack for this sort of thing. But did you notice how it happens in today’s story? His mother demonstrates this creative, holy insight first. Mary is the one who believes—unprompted—that Jesus can make a difference. She sees in her son the divine abilities that he’s not ready or able to recognize in himself. It’s Mary who tells the servants to follow Jesus’ instructions, prompting him to reveal the calling from God that he’s been hiding inside. Mary shows us that ordinary people can also see abundance and transformation where others see only dry stone jars.

Such uncommon sight—recognizing divine possibilities below the surface—is one key marker of disciples like Mary, and all who follow Christ. Poet Gerard Manley Hopkins [describes it this way](#): “The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil...” But the best way to describe this might come from confirmation students at Langford Lutheran Parish in South

Dakota. Ramona Hays, the pastor there, posted to Facebook this week about a conversation she had with them.¹ When she told them about this story, they suggested, “If the human body is 60% water, and Jesus turns water into wine, does that mean that Jesus turns us into wine?” I’ll admit the question caught me off guard [Hays writes,] and I had to think for a minute. Then I asked, ‘What would it look like if Jesus *did* turn us into wine?’ The kids looked puzzled. One of them said, ‘That would be disgusting!’ I tried again: ‘Think about it. Jesus turned plain ordinary water into the best wine that chief steward ever tasted. So how would Jesus turn us plain-ordinary-water-people into wine?’ They answered me: ‘He’d make us *holy* people.’”

Christians are not just witnesses to the signs of Jesus once upon a time in a land far, far away. God invites us also to incarnate divine potential. It’s as though *we* are the ordinary stone vessels, but the water we hold may be transformed by God into the wine of good, abundant life. Saint Irenaeus puts it this way: “The glory of God is [humanity] fully alive.” Such full-aliveness blesses the whole community.

This weekend, the witness of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his followers seems especially fitting. By divine grace, they demonstrated that ordinary actions could become paths of extraordinary liberation. Through weeks, months and years of gathering in sanctuaries like this and hearing God’s perennial call to move from slavery to freedom, black Christians and their allies were “charged with the grandeur of God”. Inspired by their passion as children of God and not limited to the label of “colored folk”, their commonplace commerce of buying and selling, bus-riding, and school-going became aerated with new, Spirit-filled potential. They became opportunities to demonstrate through collective action the equal God-belovedness and belonging of African American people. By their faith in Jesus Christ, they saw transformed the empty rock jars of Jim Crow and Coloreds Only into the water of racial integration and equal opportunity under the law, which we are *still* trying to transform into the wine of true racial equity. This is more than some secular movement of social liberation—it is a Spirit-blessed calling to recognize and honor the image of God in *all* people.

On New Year’s Eve, I mentioned something similar that we’re invited into this year. Faith Delegates connected across Minnesota through the Christian network ISIAH will aerate the casual practice of electing politicians with new, divine purpose. We will use the caucus and convention systems of both major parties to express Jesus’ command that we love our neighbors as ourselves. Like Jesus’ mother, we’ll nudge those seeking to lead Minnesota in ways that lead to abundance and transformation throughout our society. We’re accustomed to think that those who matter are the ones with money and power, the ones who call the shots and make the decisions. But Jesus’ people are doing something different, following his example today. We’ll use that which is debased and overlooked—common Minnesotans across the state—in order to make righteous legislative wine that transforms, delights and serves the whole community. I hope you will partner with other church members in this effort, and let us know on today’s Time and Talent insert if you want more information. This drive stands alongside EMC’s historic and faithful commitments, especially transforming young minds through the Preschool, caring for seniors through Meals on Wheels and serving homeless families through Beacon and Families Moving Forward.

Whether you are a part of this or any of the other efforts at EMC, come and see God’s glory, then go and show God’s glory when you leave this place. Show the divine, uncommon glory by posting righteousness instead of rant in your Facebook feed. Show glory by going the extra mile in compassion for those who suffer. Show glory with whatever you have—caucus conversations, dollars, or empty stone jars—and let them be common instruments to reveal God’s uncommon glory. Where do you see this glory? Where will you embody it?

¹ In the [Narrative Lectionary](#) Facebook group on 1/9/18, as a comment on a post by Timothy Sylvia.