

Share the Joy

a sermon based on

John 2:1-11

and delivered on

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at

Cherry Valley United Methodist Church

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This passage from John bothers some people. Jesus made wine. But how can that be? Not that he didn't have the power... but our Lord making WINE?! Ugh... Maybe it was grape juice. I hear that argument a lot, that the wine Jesus drank back in the day was grape juice. Except ... grape juice begins fermenting immediately upon being crushed. It wasn't until Thomas Welch, a Methodist and a dentist, read about Louis Pasteur's work, that grape juice (first called unfermented sacramental wine) was invented.

If we look into the text of the Scripture, we hear the chief steward say, "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." (Jn 2:10b) The implication is that the "good wine" can get people drunk, including the good wine that was "held back" until the end.

We could go on and on. Except, this story isn't about wine. In other ways, it's not even about a miracle. It's about sharing joy.

As with so many stories about Jesus and the people who come to him – in this one – there are things we don't know. Jesus attended the wedding. Why? His disciples did, because they went where he went. But why did Jesus go to this wedding? Mary was there. Was this a family wedding? A friend's wedding? But when Mary tells him that they are out of wine he says, "So what? What concern is that to you and me?"

It's not a home town wedding. It's in Cana not Nazareth. In fact it's about ten miles from Nazareth. Was there a small town rivalry between Nazareth and Cana? Was this a friend from Nazareth who'd found a girl to marry in Cana? Why the indifference? Was the groom the same kid that maybe picked on Jesus as a kid? We don't know.

What we do know is that this was a celebration. Weddings back then weren't just afternoon or evening events. The party went on for days! And they ran out of wine. Would it just have been the groom's embarrassment at running out that was the problem? Wouldn't it also have stopped the celebration? Wouldn't it have stymied the joy as this man and woman were beginning their live together?

We don't even know why it ran out. Was it poor planning? Did more people come than RSVP'd?

What exactly did the steward mean when he commented on the "good wine" that was saved until now? Was he commending the groom (as we often think)? Was he chastising the groom for holding back the good stuff? (I don't think Jesus would have put him in that spot.) Ultimately, it doesn't matter. What Jesus did was to enable the celebration of this couple's union to go on. Not just to get by with some wine, but to go on with the best even though they needed to be bailed out.

We've all heard about blaming the victim. Right? We'd like to think we're better than that, but how often do we do it? Maybe not in big matters, but those everyday situations? If he would have planned better? You should have known? What were you thinking? Sometimes we need to set people straight. But how we do it is important.

Do we have an attitude of blessing or condemnation? Do we have a theology of blessing or condemnation?

One of the things that turns me off (and I think turns off a lot of people) to religion (including Christianity) is a focus on condemnation. The fundamentalists' (who've stolen the word Evangelical) focus on avoiding Hell and pointing out everyone else's sin represents a theology of condemnation. And no matter how much lipstick you put on that pig, it still presents God as an angry, capricious deity who needs to be appeased.

And yet this is the same God who "so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. (and it continues in John 3:17 – People forget that part.) Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him." (Jn 3:16-17)

Our God is a god of blessing. Our God is a god of promise. Our God is a god of joy.

When we look back to the spiritual gifts that St. Paul talks about in that passage from 1 Corinthians, whether it be wisdom or knowledge, faith, healing or the working of miracles, he tells us that it is the same Spirit of the same Lord – the lord of blessing, promise and joy – who activates each of them and allots them to each one of us individually as the Spirit chooses (1 Cor. 12:11) What is the purpose of those gifts? What was the purpose of miracles Jesus did? It wasn't to draw attention to himself. They did; but that wasn't the intention. Consider how many times he told someone to keep it quiet. Jesus healed, Jesus forgave, Jesus gave life to a dead girl – in order to share joy. Joy for those who received his blessing as a confirmation that God loved them. Joy for their family and friends who got to see new things through the eyes of a friend who had been blind, or to hear the joy of a bird's song in the facial expression of one whose ears had been opened.

We, too, are called to share the joy. The Holy Spirit offers each of us gifts to do just that. First, though, we need to claim our joy.

Kim Kane shared a story about taking her children out to eat at a restaurant. Her six-year-old asked to say the prayer. As everyone bowed their heads and folded their hands, he prayed, "God is good. God is great. Thank you for the food, and I would even thank you more if Mom gets us ice cream for dessert."

People nearby laughed. Except for one joyless soul of a woman. "Well, I never! What is this country coming to? Praying for ice cream." Humph!

Of course the kid started crying. "Did I do something wrong? Is God mad at me?"

But an old guy sitting nearby, winked at him and said "I happen to know that God thought it was a really good prayer."

"Really?"

"Cross my heart." Then with a head nod toward that woman, he whispered, "Too bad she never asks God for ice cream. A little ice cream is good for the soul sometimes."

The boy settled down. The family finished their meal. Of course, Kim splurged on ice cream for dessert. But when the waitress brought it to the table, things didn't go as she expected. He six-year-old – the one who had prayed for ice cream – picked it up and took it to the woman who had mocked and scolded him.

"Here, this is for you. Ice cream is good for the soul sometimes, and my soul is good already."¹

That boy didn't share his ice cream any more than Jesus made wine for a wedding. He shared his joy. He blessed that woman with the thing that he had to bless with – ice cream. Each of us has been given different gifts by the Holy Spirit. No one better than another – but allotted to each of us so each of us – and together – we can share joy.

Whether it's an ability to explain Scripture – or to bring a comforting presence in the midst of chaos – or to offer sound advice – when we claim a theology of blessing – a theology of promise (instead of a theology of condemnation) – when we claim a theology of joy by sharing those gifts for the sake of others, we discover our own joy – and the joy of our God who so loved the world – that he sent his one and only Son – not to condemn the world – but to save it – and to save each of us with his blessing. AMEN

¹ Kim Kane, originally included in *Humorama* newsletter found at <https://www.preaching.com/sermon-illustrations/ice-cream-is-good-for-the-soul/>