



**“Water Turning
into Wine”**
John 2: 1-11
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Water turned into wine. You know, it’s a day-to-day occurrence for people of faith. Of course, this happens daily – for you and me, for this Church community, for all who pray and live in connection with their God of all goodness.

Water turned into wine.

(Ah, you don’t believe me....Well, the first century Christians knew this story to have many truths)

In the past one hundred years, even longer, we’ve down-graded the wedding of Cana. It’s simply called by Biblical scholars as the first of the miracles that Jesus does in the Gospel of John. It’s become a category of literature from an ancient world called “miracles. We’ve made this amazing story of day-to-day faith so hum drum. Just down right boring. Just down right unbelievable.

There’s nothing humdrum about this story. And any doubts we may have that water can’t become wine, come from human fears, not from the Spirit of God that resides in you and me.

Let’s look at the story again:
The mother of Jesus comes to her son. She says, “We’ve run out of wine.”

She knows who Jesus is. She raised him. He’s the son of God. God in their midst. Emmanuel. God with us.

And at first Jesus protests: ‘It’s not time to make wine. My time hasn’t come yet.’ As in, when I die and go to heaven, that’s the time for the banquet. That’s the coming glory.

Now, in the Scripture passage, Jesus’ Mom doesn’t say anything more. But I can imagine that before directing the servants to do as Jesus says, she simply stares at her son. She stares at him with the look that only a parent can give their child. It’s that silent stare, that look that says:...’you aren’t using the full brain power that God has given to you.. You know better. I’ve taught you better than that.’

‘Of course you can make wine. You’re God’s presence amongst us.’

She turns to the servants to do as Jesus says. And suddenly wine is overflowing in their midst.

Jesus' Mom asks Jesus for wine. Essentially she said a prayer, knowing God was with her. And she got wine.

Now always in Scripture wine and banquets are wonderful metaphors for the good life that God intends for us. Often we think that that banquet comes when we die or that that banquet, God's kingdom is the one that we're working hard for – that place of peace and justice for all that's somewhere in the future. But we forget that God is in our midst. That's why Christ came to earth, That's why even death couldn't defeat him. The Risen Christ is amongst us.

We pray for abundance in our lives to the presence already here. We pray with thanksgiving as if that abundance is already here among us. And we know it is.

What I'm saying to you is this: if we want wonderful wine to be flowing endlessly in our lives, in this United Church in the Valley, then all we have to do, is what Mary did: pray with intention and it will happen.

In fact, we know that because we have been praying with such abandon, with such positive affirming intention, that we know God's abundance in our lives. We know God's abundance in our individual lives; in our church community. God gives us more than enough resources to live our lives fully and more than enough resources to fulfil our ministry as United Church in the Valley.

And if as I'm saying this, you're saying: "No, we don't know that," then it's time that we set behind us those things and thoughts and fears and doubts that aren't from God and that hinder our living a God-filled people.

In the last days of my sabbatical, this Scripture passage just came up along in the devotions I was doing. I was absolutely astounded. Because this is the Scripture passage that I talked with the search committee eight years and five months ago. Many of you have heard me tell this story before;

I'm telling it again: The search committee asked: "how do you understand our mission-focused organizational design?" And I said: "you're making new wine. The old ways aren't working anymore. Those clay pots that Jesus directed the servants to use were ones that normally contained purified water that the priests used to wash their hands. The religion had got rigid full of old regulations that was making being people of faith to be very tedious and unmeaningful.

Through the years, I've continued to say: "We're making new wine. Wonderful, beautiful, effervescent, delightful wine." I said that. I know it's true. That's what we're doing.

But why did this Scripture passage come up in my Scripture list, now, at this time. What was God saying to me and us. I've pondered that, prayed that.

And this is what came to me. There is nothing wrong with how we interpreted the passage in the past. We are making new wine that God creates.

But here's what's missing: God expects us, the church, to live as joyful wedding guests where wine flows in response to continuous prayer.

What hinders our understanding are underlying assumptions that come from centuries of church history and practices that are so heavily laid upon me and you they are

hard to shake off. Layers of old misinterpretations of being Church -- that were never part of Jesus' understanding of the community of God nor the early Church. Yet, these practises are so a part of who we are, we respond automatically.

Here's what I'm talking about:

I went back to what was called my "ministry position paper" that I wrote in my final year of theological training. In one section we were supposed to describe the purpose of the church. My professor used this quote in his class. I liked it. I used it.

The Church is a band of men and women travelling towards the promised land: God's kingdom of justice, righteousness, peace and love. As they travel towards this goal they are stained with the dust of the journey, frequently weary, bedraggled, complaining, inclined to forget their destination and tempted to turn aside and settle down, yet repeatedly impelled by their memories and hopes to press forward.....It exists not for itself but in order to be a concrete witness in the world, a sacramental sign and anticipation in all that it is and does, to Christ and to the Kingdom.

-- George A. Lundbeck, 1970

I still like most of these words: "The church is a band of men and women travelling towards the Promised land: (Amen, sisters and brothers, that's what we're doing.

"God's kingdom of justice, righteousness, peace and love. (yes!)

"Those men and women travelling towards this goal are stained with the dust of the journey, frequently weary, bedraggled, complaining, inclined to forget their destination and tempted to turn aside and settle down, yet repeatedly impelled by their memories.... And hopes.

Hey wait a minute. I don't think I want to be a part of this group of people. I know in the past I've identified myself with these dusty folks. But I don't want to be a part of them anymore. These are not healthy people.

These people haven't bothered to take a shower, let alone wash their clothes, are worn out and tired, don't look like they've had a good night's sleep in a while let alone a vacation, carping and nitpicking at each other, confused, not sure where they're going, are they coming or they going...and to top it all off, they are stuck in the past.

You would be surprised at how often the Church with a capital "C" describes itself like this.

For decades, maybe even centuries the church has described itself like this. These dusty, bedraggled people are worn down with 2000 years of church history -- baggage that's been left over from the Middle ages, from the Puritans, the list goes on.

These people in George Lundbeck's don't at all reflect the guests at the wedding of Cana, do they? No, mention of enjoying a feast and delightful wine.

Now, the latter part of Lundbeck's quote, I like and think is significant. There is hope and "The church exists not for itself but in order to be a concrete witness in the world, a sacramental sign and anticipation in all that it is and does, to Christ and to the Kingdom.

As the church we exist to be a concrete witness to the world, an incredible sign of God's presence and anticipation of that presence now to the future.

If we're unkempt, bedraggled, grumpy, confused, not sure where we're heading, then we really are not a particularly significant sign of God's presence. Sure, God will love us like that...and we all have our human moments. But those confused, bedraggled moments are most often when we doubt God's presence among us.

That's what the early church understood and what Jesus' Mom understood. Jesus is in our midst. Here and now.

The Risen Christ is walking with us on that road: Let's rewrite these words as people who know Christ is with them:

What words or phrases would we use:

(People in congregation came up with: walking with the glow of God on each person's face, constantly praying, enjoying each other's company, dancing, sprinting, , feasting, inviting others to join in the feasting, happy, know where they are going)

Last month I took a course at Naramata on meditation and prayer. And in the last day, the leader lead us on praying to make manifest. Manifest means to bring about. God made manifest our world by creating it. The idea of the prayer was that you ponder what you desire and you pray for that. But you pray in a positive way like it has already happened. "I thank you God..."

"I thank you God for the great BMW you got me. I thank you God for the \$1million I won in the lottery....No, I'm only kidding. Because the thing is if you pray for this and get it then you need to apply all the other Christian practises such as sharing what you are given.

But the exercise had me pondering. Because it does help us define what we would really like and need in life. What we really want and desire as disciples of Christ. And then – if we're going to pray for abundance in our lives, we had better act during the rest of our day, like a people for whom these wonderful things are already happening. For example, if you think of yourself as bedraggled and dusty then chances are you're going to limp along. If you are intentionally conscious of being a positive, confident, prayerful person of God who knows where they are going, chances are you're going to get somewhere very interesting.

Prayers to make manifest. I'm United Church. I was never taught like this. This is something new to me. I'd like to learn more about it. Apparently one of the people to write about this is Wayne Dyer. I hope we can learn more about this way of prayer together.

In the meantime, let us remember that the presence of God is all around us. Pray, as Jesus' Mom knew he ought. Pray with abandon. Pray knowing God's abundance is all around us. Pray that God's goodness flows through each of us and through this Church and surely, it already does.

AMEN!