

Preacher: The Rev. R. Bruce Todd

“Saving the Best for Last”

The party is a wedding celebration. Our Wedding receptions last for about 4 hours. Back then wedding celebrations lasted four *days* and with some heavy drinking involved. In today's Gospel lesson, we overhear a conversation that is going on. The conversation is between Jesus and his mother. Mary points to the fact that they ran out of wine. In many marriages I know, the husband is supposed to know what to do if the wife calls attention to something. "Honey, my car is on empty." Translated, that means, "It is time for you to drive the car down to the gas station and fill it up." Or when you hear, "The Baby has a dirty diaper." That's not just an observation, it's a directive to CHANGE IT!

When Mary said, "There is no wine," Jesus was to translate that into: "Do something." Now Jesus answers a question Mary never asked. Jesus answers by saying, "What concern is that of yours? My hour has not come." Who said anything about his hour coming? It must have been difficult to communicate with a son whose mind was not present at the party, but was thinking constantly about the inclusive banquet in the kingdom of God. I imagine Mary giving Jesus the look that tells him that it will be far easier for him to just do what she wants than to have a conversation that goes nowhere. Then she instructs people to do exactly what Jesus says. The servants put water INTO the pots - but it's Wine that comes OUT of the pots - and really good wine! The wine steward reveals the custom of the day: "Normally at a party like this they serve the good wine first and the bad wine when everyone is drunk. You have saved the best for last!"

We are told that this was Jesus' first sign or miracle. We are told that it revealed his glory. We are told that his disciples believed. Jesus is beginning to get a reputation, a reputation that he saves the best for last! At least that's what he does with wine. Just think of what he'll do with miracles. Changing water into wine is just the beginning. Look at this scene in its historical context. Jesus, at this point, had not performed a single miracle. He was thirty years old and had just gathered together his disciples. He knows that if he performs a miracle, a clock will start ticking and it will not stop ticking until he gets to Calvary. Crowds will flock; investigators will be dispatched. Is this the appropriate moment? Has his hour come?

Apparently He decides that it has, everything seems to be in place, so he makes his move and gives his first public sign that he is different; he changes water into wine. It was a quiet and private miracle. It happened in the entryway of the wedding hall. There was no hocus-pocus about it, no flash of lightning, no magic words or incantations. So subtle, so silent, that only Mary and the servants really knew what had happened. One minute there were six jars of water; the next minute there were six jars of wine.

With the discussions this week about late night T.V. and reading this gospel lesson, I remembered years ago when Johnny Carson was the host of The Tonight Show and he interviewed an eight year old boy.

The young man was asked to appear because he had rescued two friends in a coalmine outside his hometown in West Virginia.

As Johnny questioned the boy, it became apparent to him and the audience that the young man was a Christian. So Johnny asked him if he attended Sunday school. When the boy said he did Johnny inquired, "What are you learning in Sunday school?" "Last week, our lesson was about when Jesus went to a wedding and turned water into wine." The audience laughed, but Johnny tried to keep a straight face. Then he said, "And what did you learn from that story?" The boy squirmed in his chair. It was obvious that he hadn't thought about this. But then he lifted up his face and said, "If you're going to have a wedding, make sure you invite Jesus!"

Make sure you invite Jesus - not just to weddings, but to *everything* in your life. If Jesus is present - you won't run out. There are too many stories where people feel that the wine of life has run out. The party is over and there's no reason to go forward. Carlos Baker wrote a biography of Ernest Hemmingway. Hemmingway was a Nobel Prize author known for his book "The Old Man and The Sea." He was a person who went for it all. A newspaper reporter, ambulance driver during WWII, involved in the Spanish Civil War, friend to bullfighters as well as authors--he did it all.

Baker wrote that on a Sunday morning, Ernest awoke early as always. He put on the red "Emperor's robe" and padded softly down the padded stairway. The early sunlight lay in pools on the living room floor. He had noticed that the guns were locked up in the basement, but the keys, as he well knew, were on the window ledge above the kitchen sink. He tiptoed down the basement stairs and unlocked the storage room. It smelled as dank as a grave. He chose a double-barreled shotgun with a tight choke. He had used it for years to shoot pigeon's. He took some shells from one of the boxes in the storage room, closed and locked the door, and climbed the basement stairs. The bright day outside did not deter him. He crossed the living room to the front foyer, a shrine-like entryway five feet by seven feet, with oak-paneled walls and a floor of linoleum tile. He slipped in two shells, lowered the gun butt carefully to the floor, leaned forward, pressed the twin barrels against his forehead just about the eyebrows and tripped both triggers.

It happens in our own lives. The wine runs out. We become strangers to our selves and we feel that we have nowhere to go. What are we going to do when the wine runs out? It is a sad truth that we usually don't come to God until we have a need. Even at the Wedding at Cana, Jesus was not approached until there was an emergency. We are the same way. We usually come when we have a need. Make sure you invite Jesus, not just to weddings, but to *everything* in your life. If Jesus is present, you won't run out.

People who have addictions have learned this. They always try on their own to overcome their addiction. But they run out - they run out of will-power, determination, strength. There are programs for Alcoholics - drug addicts and sex addicts that all rely on the power of God to help them overcome their addiction. It is the power of God that empowers them to make it.

I remember a conversation I had with a surgeon at the hospital where I served as the chaplain. He had just completed a surgery that he had never done before. He said that during the surgery he realized he was in over his head - he lost his confidence. He told me that he literally stepped back from the operating table, and in a silent prayer simply said: "Jesus, guide my hands!" ...and the confidence that he had lost was restored. The operation was a success.

I have spoken with runners, teachers, factory workers, spouses, teenagers, hospital patients, People from all walks of life who have told me that they had run out of strength - patience - determination - energy - confidence - hope - - - but when they took their problem to the Lord, similar to Mary taking the Groom's problem to Jesus, like the water jugs, they were filled up again. They were filled with new hope - renewed strength - stronger determination - enduring patience. And Jesus is known for saving the best for last. Changing water into wine was only the beginning. The Miracles started piling up. Stopping a woman's 7 year flow of blood; Making the Blind see; Making the deaf hear; Feeding over 5,000 people, Raising his friend Lazarus from the dead.

Is there anyone here today who has not heard that on Tuesday of this week just before sunset, a powerful 7 magnitude earthquake rocked the island country of Haiti. You have seen the images of suffering and the aftermath on the internet and TV. This country was already considered by many to be the poorest country in the western hemisphere. They had no place to go but up. And now this.

Talk about people who must feel empty! But as we have learned, if we feel empty, Jesus can fill us up! Even in Haiti miracles are happening. After 43 hours buried in the wreckage of her home, Port-au-Prince resident Gladys Louis Jeune was pulled to safety by rescuers, including her ecstatic daughter. When the home where Danielle Trapanier had been living collapsed, she fell two stories and landed in a small basement space. She lay there, stunned, for more than 24 hours before being freed by a search team. "When they pulled her out she was confused and in shock, but with only some relatively minor scrapes." An 11-year-old Haitian girl survived the tumbling concrete of a house, while everyone else around her were killed. As rescuers tried to dig her out, however, they discovered that her right leg was trapped beneath debris, and feared that it would have to be amputated if she were to be freed. But as darkness fell, a saw was used to cut through an iron beam that was keeping her trapped. She was then taken to a first-aid center for treatment on her injured leg. Frank Thorp, an American journalist living in Haiti, was traveling outside Port-au-Prince when the earthquake hit. Our own member Lynn Verna hadn't slept since the earthquake hit until she heard Wednesday night that her mother and brother were alive and safe. However, several other family members were killed.

Miracles still happen, especially in the midst of tragedy. The disciples learned this after they placed Jesus' lifeless body into the tomb and sealed it up. They locked themselves in a room and just wondered what they would do next. But like with wine, Jesus saves the best for last! What about the hundreds of thousands that died? The ultimate Miracles comes after life! "I have gone to prepare a place for you, and will come again to take you unto myself." "I am the resurrection and the life" says the Lord, "Those who believe in me will never die."

There was a time when Death took away Hope. But through Christ, death brings us new hope. We have the promise of Salvation. We have the promise of Eternal Life. We have a seat reserved for us at that heavenly banquet table.

Jesus saves the Best for Last. All the Miracles we may experience here on earth; finding a person to love; the birth of your child; the miraculous healing of an illness; the miracle of Life itself; whatever the miracle may be. It's just the beginning

of what our Lord has in store for us at the end, because Jesus saves the best for last!

While we rejoice in the miracle of those who have been saved in Haiti. We need to remember those who mourn the death of their loved ones in Haiti. But we also need to remember the miracle that their loved ones are now experiencing as they enter into God's Heavenly Kingdom.

Make sure you invite Jesus to this party called LIFE - and we will never run out - and Jesus saves the Best - - - for Last!
Amen