

Pastor Daryl Diddle

Sermon Series: *Jesus: Provocateur*

Do Whatever He Tells You

September 6, 2020

John 2:1-11

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

"Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him. [NIV]

---

One of the unfortunate realities of where we are as a nation at the moment is that people, more than ever in my lifetime anyway, are more reactionary – we seem to be far more easily provoked. It's like most of the nation has been eating chocolate-covered espresso beans by the handful or taking Red Bull intravenously.

And I know I'm not the only one who's noticed this.

You can hardly say or write or suggest anything without provoking some response by someone that, frankly, is far more intense – far beyond how that same person would have responded to your statement or issue not even a year ago.

You say something like, "Isn't that grass a nice shade of green?"

And someone will jump up and angrily say something like, "No it isn't! That's the color green of the pale horse of the apocalypse – and people need to know that!"

You post somewhere something like, "I had the best chocolate chip ice cream the other day..."

And someone will reply, "Only a callous, uncaring dolt could think about ice cream at a time like this!"

If you wear a red shirt, you're labeled a fascist.

If you wear a blue shirt, you're presumed a socialist.

If you wear a yellow shirt, you're told you're gutless – even though, in truth, you were just wearing what was clean!

Between the racial stuff, the police stuff, the protest stuff, the political stuff, the moral stuff, the natural disaster stuff, the Russia stuff, the China stuff – and certainly the virus stuff, we have become such a triggered people that we can hardly stand ourselves.

And, I'm not saying that stuff is unimportant – not at all.

It's just that more and more people – people who were normal a few months ago, maybe because of passion, maybe because of crisis fatigue, or maybe just because of exhaustion, are losing their filters when it comes to interacting with others.

We are a nation who is *reacting* instead of *responding*.

I mean, what's happened to giving others the benefit of the doubt?

What's happened to civil debate? To conversation? To asking questions before jumping to conclusions?

We're making accusations based on presumptions, and by the time we realize that our presumptions are wrong, the damage has already been done.

The stresses of our day are causing us to become a too easily-provoked people.

And, of course, some in our culture are playing on that, and we need to understand that.

There are provocateurs at work in our world – in our nation – who are taking advantage of these circumstances and are very intentionally pushing us toward furthering their own causes. They're playing on our emotions, on our fragility, on our exhaustion or our impatience, or maybe on something else.

So, first of all, some of us have to stand down a little bit, and regain some perspective.

I mean, if you wake up in the morning angry or trembling – and you haven't even had any coffee yet, then you may need to regain some perspective.

And all of us have to make sure we don't get caught up in untrue or unscriptural or ungodly causes, certainly, or in behaviors or presumptions or reactions simply because that's the easiest thing, and maybe even the popular thing to do.

In all this violent reactionary behavior, people are building walls that will take some doing to tear down. We're burning bridges that are going to take a long time to rebuild.

Just as people, but especially as Christ-followers, you and I are responsible for guarding ourselves against ungodly provocateurs.

Now, on the other hand, there is one *Provocateur* at work in our world to whom we *do* want to respond – and I'm calling Jesus a *provocateur* assuming we all understand that provocateur is not necessarily a negative label. A provocateur is simply someone who provokes – someone who calls forth action and response and movement from others.

Jesus was – and still is today – a provocateur in the best sense of the word, in that He moves people to response.

The things He does and the things He says – frankly, just who He is – have been a source of provocation in people ever since He walked this earth in person.

In fact, I'd argue that Jesus is the most powerful and effective provocateur who has ever lived. He has brought responses out of people that even they, themselves, didn't fully understand.

Just by a word, at times He was able to turn people's perspectives and assumptions and expectations inside out and upside down.

And He's still doing that, by His Spirit, today. He's still doing it—just as He did, and doing it even more efficiently than He was ever able to do while incarnate. Jesus' Spirit moves today in ways He couldn't move in person. His Spirit speaks, prods, nudges, urges, provokes—sometimes very gently, sometimes rather aggressively, but always, always toward godliness and holiness—Christlikeness.

And we want to respond to His kind of provocation—just as the best of those who lived with Him in His days on earth did.

Like Mary, His mother, for example.

When you think about it, there was so much about Jesus that Mary didn't understand.

You see, you parents who don't fully understand your kids (and what parent does, really?), you're not alone. Mary knew what that was like.

And Scripture tells us that from early on, instead of demanding answers, Mary, at times, simply had to treasure things in her heart about Jesus. She had to leave certain things to wonder—to discover in time, because in Him, there were questions that were just not immediately answerable.

Yet through the years, Mary's understanding of Jesus did grow. Her faith in Him, at least on one level, did deepen.

Even before He moved into the part of His life that we call His "active ministry years," and even though there was still a lot she didn't understand, Mary had come to realize that Jesus was unique. She realized He was good and that He was utterly trustworthy, and that He would always do what was right, and that He was always out for everyone else's best.

Which is why she responds to Him as she does here at this wedding—the wedding at Cana.

Now, we don't know for sure, but this was probably a family wedding or at least some close family friends, because Mary was involved in the planning or at least in serving. We can tell that for several reasons.

First, because she knew about the wine situation before others did, she had been informed of this embarrassing development.

Second, because she obviously felt some responsibility to do something about it.

And then third, because she had the authority to instruct the house servants there—she had the power to tell them what to do.

So, what is Mary's solution? She takes the problem to Jesus—which is a rather funny thing to those of us who are conservative, holiness people.

"Jesus, what do we do—we're out of wine?"

Our answer would be, we celebrate, right? There's no problem here!

But Mary understood that this was no cause for celebration. To run out of anything in a wedding celebration would have been deeply embarrassing and even shameful to the family—in their culture.

So, Mary brings Jesus in on the problem.

Now, much has been written about Jesus' reply to Mary in which He answers her, as my translation says, "*Woman, why do you involve me?*"

On the surface of things, it looks as though Jesus is being aloof with her, or even a bit rude.

But of course, if we know Jesus, we know He's not being rude.

Part of the issue has to do with the cultural differences in language.

For example, He calls Mary, not "mother" here, but "woman," which sounds strange or distant to us, but it wasn't really, in that day. It's actually the very same way He addresses Mary from the cross, when He tells her to behold John, who would from then on be as a son to her.

Maybe in our language, "dear woman" or "dear one" is closer to the sentiment He expresses.

The next part of Jesus' reply, though, is also strange. He says, literally, "*What is this to me and to you?*"

It sounds as if He is saying, "Hey, it's not our problem—stay out of it," but that's not a reflection of His concern with the circumstance or with His mother's feelings.

What Jesus was really trying to make sure of was that she understood that His agenda was not going to be set by earthly circumstances. His agenda was up to His Father, and not His mother—which is why He goes on to say, "*it is not yet my time.*"

He knew very well that any sort of demonstration of power here would dramatically change His world—it would begin the last chapter in His life, actually, and so He had to know the timing of this move was His Father's.

Now, of course, Mary could not have understood all this.

She surely couldn't have expected Jesus to perform the miracle that He did here, since verse 11 there tells us that this was the first miraculous thing He'd ever done.

What Mary did understand, though, was that Jesus, her oldest son, through His thirty or so years of life, had proven to be the kind of person who was so *capable*, so *trustworthy*, so *dependable*, and so *able* to take care of life's problems that she was entirely comfortable trusting Him with this major issue that had arisen.

You see, Mary could not have known, exactly, what Jesus would do, but she knew that He would do something, and that something would be the right and the good thing—the best thing that could be done.

That's why she tells the servants there, "*Do whatever He tells you.*"

"*Do whatever He tells you. Give Him full access. Let Him be the boss. If you will just do whatever He says to do, things will work out OK.*"

This is the response to Jesus of a model disciple.

And it's the person—the proven character of Jesus—that provoked this response from Mary.

You see, following Jesus is not about faith that's in any way blind—that's not what we see here in Mary. What we see here is faith based on Jesus' proven faithfulness in relationship with her over time.

Jesus is the kind of person that, the better you know Him, the more you trust Him.

The more you talk with Him, the more you realize He cares.

The longer you hang around Him, the more you believe in Him.

The deeper you go with Him, the more you're compelled—the more you're provoked to give yourself to Him.

Because—as Mary found, and as so many millions have found through the centuries since—to know Jesus is to find that He's real. He's loving. He's concerned. He's good, and He's entirely trustworthy.

To know Jesus is to want to do as He says—more and more and more.

That's the kind of response Jesus provoked in Mary, and that's the kind of response He still provokes, the kind of response He still draws out of anyone who will really, honestly engage with Him—anyone who will truly open themselves to Him and who will allow Him into their lives.

He proves Himself faithful, and so He provokes only more and more trust and confidence and love.

Now, of course we know the end of the story here: Jesus wound up miraculously creating somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons of wine, and it was far better wine than the very best they'd ever had!

And that saved the day.

But Mary didn't know He was going to do that. She didn't know how this would work out.

All Mary knew for sure was that Jesus was the right one to turn to with the concerns of life.

Elisabeth Elliot once wrote, "Faith does not eliminate questions, but faith knows where to take them."

There are so many questions about life in these days, and some of the problems are so complex that we don't know how they could ever really be answered.

Yet Jesus invites us to bring our questions and troubles to Him with the trust of Mary—a trust that His own character will provoke in us if we'll give Him that opportunity.

Will you open yourself to Him? Will you spend some time with Him—get to know Him—and so let Him prove Himself faithful to you?

*Prayer:*

Jesus, we've seen evidence of Your care, Your love, Your faithfulness. Even if never before in our lives, we've seen it in this instance that the apostle John reports, and, upon looking, we see it in many, many more instances, both here in Your Word, and in the lives of those we know today who have trusted You—who have followed You—and who have counseled us, in some fashion, to "Do whatever He tells you."

Would You help us put that sort of trust in You into action—especially in these days of uncertainty and frustration and confusion?

Help us not to demand all the answers ahead of time, but simply to do as You tell us to do—that you might work out Your will in our lives, and through us in our world, and so You might receive all the glory.

*The Service of Holy Communion*

*Closing Song*

*Benediction:*

Over the next few weeks, we're going to be looking at some other responses different people had to Jesus—some good, some not so good, but all of them very revealing of the heart of the person involved.

I think we'll find that Jesus' provocations are still amazingly relevant to our day.

May your response and my response to Jesus always be to listen to these words of Mary, His mother, and *do whatever He tells us to do.*