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Sermon Series: *Looking Up*, No. 6

Saving the Day

February 13, 2022

John 2:1-11 (NIV)

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴ "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, ⁹ 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 ¹⁰ 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."

¹¹ 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.

Would you turn, with me, back to the second chapter of the gospel of John? The first eleven verses of John, Chapter 2.

What do you do when you run out of wine?

That's the question that's presented in this passage.

What do you do when you run out of wine?

Wine has gained a lot of popularity in our country, especially over the past couple decades. In 2014, the US became the world's number one wine consumer, and you see evidence of that just in the amount of wine pop art that's out there. It's all over the place – the little sayings, accessories, pictures. It's in all the little gift stores and shoppes – those are the gift shops where shop is spelled, "shoppe."

Wine is everywhere – far more than it used to be.

Even within the Church – the protestant church, anyway – wine and all alcohol, except rubbing alcohol, used to be far more taboo than it is anymore.

Now, there are some groups – and we are part of that – who still advocate for abstinence from alcohol and other addictive things, just based on the tremendous damage and hurt that it causes day by day in our culture. Advocating for abstinence used to be the position of most of the Protestant church, and it is, unashamedly, part of both the heritage and the present of the Free Methodist Church.

So, for us, ecclesiastically and organizationally speaking, what you do when you run out of wine is: you celebrate!

But more and more of our culture don't share that conviction, and so they'll answer that question differently.

What do you do when you run out of wine?

In the ancient eastern cultures, hospitality was just about a sacred practice, and wine was a huge part of hospitality, because wine was the drink of choice. There were no pop machines; Starbucks had not yet reached that part of the world; and you could only keep milk without refrigeration for so long.

So, it was either water or wine.

Now drinking in excess – and certainly drunkenness – was never celebrated by the Jewish ethos. There are plenty of warnings and prohibitions in Scripture against the dangers and the lack of wisdom and responsibility of drunkenness.

And Scripture does prohibit drinking for people who hold leadership positions – people who are responsible for the welfare of others.¹ Which is another reason the Protestant Church has advocated for abstinence: she sees herself as a leader responsible for the good of others in our world.

But it's also true that several times in Scripture wine is regarded as a good gift from God.²

So, to run out in a situation where houseguests were concerned was a terribly embarrassing thing in Jesus' day.

But even more so at a wedding party, since in Jewish culture, like most cultures, the wedding is one of the most joyful and happiest of occasions.

In Jesus' day, to run out of wine at a wedding celebration would be like, say, running out of food or wedding cake to us today. You invite all these people to your home, then have nothing to offer them.

So, what do you do when you run out of wine?

Well, one thing you don't do is announce it to everybody – that is, if you don't want to be mortally embarrassed and humiliated in front of all your friends.

I mean, you'd be announcing your own unpreparedness and poor planning, not to mention the end of the party.

Now personally, especially as I've gotten older, I'm an early-to-bed kind of person.

And, as I've gotten older, to be quite honest, I've begun to care less and less about what other people may think of me in certain ways.

So, for me – the party's over! I don't care that we started at 5:00 and it's only 7:30. The party's over.

Everybody out!

Some of you will get the opportunity to practice that with the Super Bowl parties tonight.

But you couldn't have gotten away with that in Jesus' culture.

(Actually, Annette wouldn't let me get away with that today.)

¹ Proverbs 31:4-5

² Psalm 104:15, 1 Timothy 4:4

In Jesus' culture, this was a major problem involving responsibility and shame and disgrace.

So—what do you do when you run out of wine?

Well, you need help, so you take the problem to someone you trust, someone who will help but will practice discretion and not blab it all over the place. And Mary, Jesus' mother, was that person in this situation.

Now, we don't know why she was, for sure. Maybe she was a trusted friend, maybe a member of the groom's family who was responsible for the wedding reception.

We don't know why, but the problem was shared with her.

"What shall we do? We've run out of wine."

And through the ages, Mary has been called the "model disciple," in part, because of what we see in her right here.

First of all, you can tell the sort of person Mary is simply by knowing that the "shortage problem" was shared with her.

She was known by this host family to be loyal, trustworthy and wise, which should not surprise us, since God Himself saw these same characteristics in her 30 years or so before this moment. Mary's sterling character is why God chose her to be the mother of Jesus.

There weren't too many people like Mary around, I'd venture to guess. So, the groom's family was wise in taking the problem to her.

And, of course, Mary was wise to take the problem to Jesus.

"What shall we do? They've run out of wine?"

Why did Mary take the problem to Jesus? What did Mary expect Jesus to do?

It's hard to know.

We're told that this was the first of Jesus' miracles; there's no evidence that He did anything miraculously amazing as He grew up.

Actually, we're told that those from His hometown rejected His claims because, they said, "he's just a carpenter, the son of Joseph."³

So, it's hard to believe that Mary would have expected Him to do anything like He wound up doing there with the water jars.

Scripture's last mention of Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, was when Jesus was 12—when He'd stayed behind in Jerusalem, and the whole family went looking for Him.

Since Joseph isn't mentioned after that, and since when Jesus was on the cross He gave Mary into the care of John, the strong presumption is that Joseph died when Jesus was fairly young.

So, being the oldest son and being remarkably intelligent and wise and resourceful (as, um, oldest sons so often are), even apart from His divine characteristics, Mary very likely came to depend on Jesus through the years.

Thus, even though she really had no idea what He could or would do about it, several things combined to cause Mary to take the problem to Him:

1. Mary knew the problem at hand was serious.
2. Mary knew there was no simple solution.
3. Mary was a person of sensibility and faith.
4. Mary had observed Jesus' resourcefulness and wisdom in days past.
5. Mary knew that Jesus was trustworthy.
6. And, Mary believed that if *anyone* could do anything about this issue, *Jesus could*.

So, with no preconceived notion of what He could or would do, but trusting in His character and ability, Mary takes the problem to Jesus, and says to him:

"What do you do when you run out of wine?"

Now some through the ages have been tripped up, startled, by Jesus' response to His mother here. To more modern ears it may seem rude and uncaring to start His response by calling His mother, "Woman."

But this is not, as it might seem to us, a term of disrespect or even derision. Jesus uses the same word from the cross when He lovingly makes arrangements with John for her care after His death.

The fact is, there is no good English translation of this sentiment, that combines both love and some degree of separation—which *is* what Jesus is doing here.

He deeply loves His mother, and yet in His response, He's declaring that He is far more than Mary's son, and that His agenda and choices depend, not on His earthly mother's wishes, but on His Heavenly Father's wishes.

Jesus is saying to Mary, here, the same thing He'd said to His family back when He was twelve: "Much as I love you and appreciate you, in the end, I have to be about my Father's business. So, no matter what seems right and good and appropriate to you in this time and at this moment, in the end, I have to do what God says for me to do."

Jesus communicates that sentiment several times, in several ways—not just about Himself, but about all who would truly follow Him.

This is what He means back in Mark, Chapter 3, when his mother and brothers come looking for him, and He says, "My mother and brothers are those who do God's will."⁴

You see? He's saying that, even as strong as family love is, to do God's will is more important.

Or, when He told the fellow who wanted to follow Him, but only after his father died, Jesus told him, "Let the dead bury their own dead – you come and follow me."⁵

That sounds rather heartless, but, you see, those places: they're not about the diminishing of earthly love among family and friends. They're about keeping love of God, expressed in obedience to Him, above everything else.

⁴ Mark 3:35

⁵ Matthew 8:21-22

³ Mark 6:1-6

Much as He loved His mother, Jesus had to do as God said.

So, what is Jesus' answer to the question, "*What do you do when you run out of wine?*"

Well, you present the problem to God and you do what He says to do.

And considering what Jesus wound up doing, God the Father obviously gave Him the OK.

Which was a big deal, because Jesus knew that it would do more in His own life than just create wine.

What do you do when you run out of wine?

What do you do when you encounter a problem, a big problem, a seemingly unsolvable problem?

You look up.

You present the problem to God.

And you do what He says to do.

Just as it unfolded here:

The family presents the problem to Mary, a person of faith whom they trust.

Mary presents the problem to Jesus, a person of faith whom she trusts.

Jesus presents the problem to God His Father, whom He implicitly trusts.

Everybody involved is looking up here, you see?

And then, the answer begins to flow back down:

God the Father tells Jesus what to do.

Jesus tells Mary He'll do as the Father says.

Mary tells the servants of the family there, "Do whatever Jesus says."

And everybody does.

Everybody does what God says to do.

This is the way to solve problems, you see? Even big ones! Even impossible ones!

Just look at the results.

Verse 6 there tells us that the water in six stone jars – 20-30 gallons a piece – is miraculously turned into wine! That's between 120 and 180 gallons of wine.

That's a lot of wine – and it's good wine! It's wine that is better than any the people there had been drinking. Problem solved!

Problem solved in a way that far exceeded everyone's expectations!

Why?

Because there was someone there who knew to look up, to hear from God, and then to do whatever God said to do.

People like that – people like Mary – are a blessing to all those around them, you see?

They may not know precisely, themselves, how to solve the problem – how to save the day, but they absolutely know Who can.

They're people of calm in times of chaos.

They're people of confidence in the midst of anxiety.

They're people of faith in a world of doubt.

They're people with answers in a culture of questions.

This is what the follower of Jesus is supposed to be, and it's what every follower of Jesus *can* be.

The presence of Christ: a calm, confident faith-filled presence with real answers to the problems of our world.

God sent His Holy Spirit to transform and empower His people to be this presence, and even today, God is looking for those who will simply decide that we're going to listen to Him:

we're going to take our problems and concerns to Him;

we're going to look up and trust that God will give the perfect answer at the perfect time;

and no matter what, we're going to do what He tells us to do.

This is what Mary did here – and what a blessing she was to her world!

Wow, does our world today need more Marys!

People who know where to take life's problems.

People who are content to leave them with Jesus.

Those are the people who will save the day.

God invites you to be a Mary.

To live life looking up to God.

To trust His Son, Jesus, implicitly with your soul and with all your concerns.

And then to be able to help save the day for someone near you.

Look, you've trusted Jesus with your soul.

Is there some situation in your life – or maybe in the life of your family or a friend – that you need to turn over to Jesus?

To ask Him, "Jesus, what do you do when..." and then just leave it to Him?

Will you be a Mary in someone's world so that God might use you to save the day?

Prayer: Father, you know that there are people all around us in crisis: people worried; people fearful. When they ask us, "What do you do when this happens or that happens or this or that threatens? What do you do when you run out of money or time or patience or whatever?" When they ask us, Father, help our answers to be the wise and faithful answer of Mary: to take the issue to Jesus and then simply say, "Do whatever Jesus tells you to do."

Closing Song: *Make Me A Blessing*

Benediction: May God find in us the faith and trust that Mary had – to always be looking up, so that, through us, Jesus can save the day – every day – for someone in our world.