

“Filled to the Brim”
Stouffville United Church
Sunday, January 20, 2019

John 2: 1-11

The Wedding at Cana. Do you see the long wooden tables, stretched out in rows, the open sky overhead? Every place to possibly sit is taken. Does your eye catch the colours of the clothing of the guests – home-spun cloth, perhaps stitching or embellishment of some kind, bracelets, hair pieces catching the light of the oil lamps. Do you see the bride and groom sitting side by side, heads together, holding hands, enamoured of this new found identity of husband and wife?

I smell the spices of the food on the tables. Do you hear the singing, the laughter, the voices raised in spirited debate, or in jovial teasing? There’s a clang of a dropped cup, the jangling of bracelets. A dog runs under the tables looking for scraps. Someone playing a stringed instrument, music in the air. All the sights and sounds of celebration, of closeness.

Also in the air, hopes and dreams that accompany this celebration of love. And also a sense in the hearts of some, a loneliness in the midst of a crowd, hearts that cannot sing because of sorrow or worry.

And in the midst of all of this humanity, is Jesus. Jesus, with his mother Mary. His disciples are also there. And they have been sharing in the meal and drinking the wine. And Mary notices that the wine is all gone. It would appear the evening is still young.

And Mary says to Jesus, “They have no wine.” And Jesus says to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” But it becomes something to him. And he tells the servants to fill six stone water jars, each holding 20 to 30 gallons, with water. He then orders them to draw some out and take it to the chief steward, who upon tasting it declares it to be the best wine. He says, ‘You have kept the good wine till now.’

This story is only recorded in the Gospel of John. After turning the water to wine, John writes, “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.” John uses the word ‘sign’ instead of the word ‘miracle’. His Gospel is sometimes called the Gospel of Signs. And he will close his Gospel in Chapter 20 with these words, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of this disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may life in his name.

A sign does not have a life of its own, but points to something else, something greater than itself. So this turning of water to wine, the first sign, is a sign that points to God’s overflowing abundance. The wedding at Cana tells us a story of God’s abundance in a time of need, when we thought nothing was left. And we have to ask ourselves, “How do we reconcile a story of potent generosity with a world of tremendous need?”¹

¹ *Ibid.*

A commentary writes, “In a world where for so many there is no clean water – let alone fine wine – where is the extravagance of God? In a world where children play in bomb craters the size of thirty-gallon wine jugs, why the divine reluctance? In a world where desperate mothers must say to their small children, “We have no food,” why has the hour not yet come? No matter how we rationalize divine activity, we still want to tug at Jesus’ sleeve and say: “they have no wine.”²

We say, You fix it Jesus.

There is no wine. Fix it Jesus. Does that mean we sit back and do nothing? And then weep tears when we tell our grandchildren that the reason the map of the world no longer looks the same is because we did not notice the melting of the polar caps and the rising of the sea levels. Do we sit back and do nothing and then weep tears when we tell our grandchildren that we did not notice islands of plastic garbage forming in the oceans, we did not notice the extinction of animal, reptiles, birds, insects, fish and whale populations. There is no wine.

Mary Oliver was an American Pulitzer prize winning poet, who passed away this week at the age of 83. She wrote, ‘When I am Among the Trees’

When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
but walk slowly, and bow often.

Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, “Stay awhile.”
The light flows from their branches.

And they call again, “It’s simple,” they say,
“and you too have come into the world to do this,
to go easy, to be filled with light, and to shine.”

How is it that in a world that all too easily shouts out ‘there is no wine’, we miss the ‘best wine’ that is right next to us – in this case a grove of trees that impart to the person walking under their canopy, here is abundance, here is never ending light and community and promise.

And we say there is no wine.

² Feasting on the Word, Theological Perspective, p. 262.

A friend's mother died at the age of 101 and a half. She was a bit of a writer. Suffering from a physical ailment that limited her mobility, she would lie on her family room floor looking out into her backyard, and she wrote, "I watch the snow melt, the leaves appear, the birds come and the babies hatch, the leaves turn red and yellow. I formed a passion for my unremarkable backyard, which has never left me." From the ordinary, she discovered the extraordinary. She was filled with a passion for the unremarkable. She found wine where it seemed there was no wine.

When Jesus turned the water into wine, he revealed himself as the one who offers abundance where there is scarcity, who offers refreshment where there is thirst.

There is a group of Canadian hymnwriters, called the Common Cup Company, and they wrote lyrics to a song about the Wedding at Cana:

Some friends of mind got married about three days ago.
I could take you to the place in the valley just below
But I think I'll stay up here a time and enjoy the sweet warm glow
That has come from the taste of Cana wine.

It was just a simple wedding feast, you know the kind I mean,
Holding hands, holding hearts, and holding fast to all their dreams.
But somehow I got the feeling it was more than first it seemed
Must have been from the taste of Cana wine.

I didn't have that much to drink but I've never felt so tall.
The wine was filling holes I hadn't known at all.
It touched the deepest hurts in me 'till it found and filled my soul.
Never tasted the like of Cana wine.

That marriage down in Cana brought new life to my friends.
I bless them and I wish them all the fullness that life can bring.
But a new life's rising in me, too, like an overflowing stream,
And it comes from the taste of Cana wine.

'But a new life's rising in me too, like an overflowing stream, and it comes from the taste of this Cana wine.' And I wonder, where do I find this Cana wine?

Mary says to Jesus; the wine has run out. He answers, what has this to do with me. It will have everything to do with Jesus, when on the night before he was betrayed, he will take the cup of wine, and bless it and give it to his friends and say to them, Drink, this and remember me. I shall not drink from this cup again until I see you in heaven. And we drink the wine, from the communion cup, to remember him. It is one of the most sacred moments in worship. In the tasting of the wine, we receive new life in him.

To paraphrase the song from earlier,

“This wine fills holes you didn’t know you had,

It touches the deepest hurts in you,

as it finds and fills your soul.

You’ve never tasted the like

of this Cana wine.’