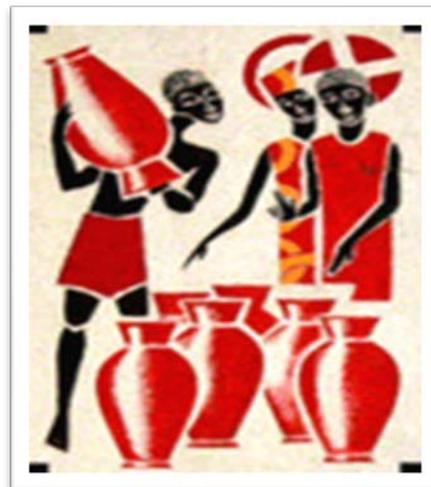


Groundwork for a Miracle
 January 16, 2022
 John 2: 1 – 11

Prayer: Transforming God, whose presence in Jesus blessed the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, and whose gifts are available to all who will accept them; inspire us now as you speak once more through the scriptures. Grant us the courage to answer when you call our names...

Do you remember going to weddings? In person? I always cringe when I see those wedding bloopers video clips. It happens too easily...Weddings are of course, joyous occasions, but among clergy, who preside over the day, they are commonly viewed as accidents, if not calamities, waiting to happen.



*Altar of Keur Moussa Abbey,
 Senegal (mural)*

Artist: Father George Saget

1963

In Cana the bride and groom were taking part in the traditional seven-day wedding feast in the groom's home. We do not know who is getting married in Cana – whether they are young or older, whether it is a first marriage or a remarriage. If you scratch the surface of any wedding, you are likely to find a lot of tension. I would not say that the tension is any kind of good predictor about the success of the marriage. It is just free-floating anxiety – there are a lot of little details to attend to, which people are not used to doing very often, together with the weight of memories about happy and unhappy marriages in the family – there is very little we can do to improve someone else's marriage. Parents, children, friends alike must stand by and wish them well. Everyone remembering...remembering every wedding they've attended, the marriages they admire, the ones that failed – it's all in the room together with this couple and not knowing the future.

It is high comedy if it isn't happening to you...Running out of food or drink at a wedding reception sounds...at least to me...par for the course....

In my experience, it's been more like the kitchen got the vegan plated dinners mixed up with the king-cut of Prime Rib plated dinners, and there's this table of mild-mannered sincere vegetarians sitting together looking askance at the large pieces of rare meat which have been placed in front of them – and no, the kitchen does not have any more vegetarian entrees. Someone will have to go out back and pick something for them to eat...and quickly...

Running out of wine before the party is over – Mary is sensitive to the problem. And when she says to her son, “they have no wine” he answers her, “what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” I've checked this carefully, and there is not a commentary out there which will say that this answer to his mother is as rude as it

sounds. Apparently, in their language this is a respectful way to address your mother – I have it on good authority. So, ignoring the funny tone in the English translation 2000 years later, Mary says to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you...”

Mary has spoken to her son, and alerted the servants, and the servants are now the ones who are in a position to understand what happens next. If you are a guest at the wedding, unless you make it your business to befriend the wait staff, this problem and what happens next will get right by you. The servants know only all too clearly when the wine runs out, and exactly how it gets replenished. The steward says: “everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine, after the guests have already had (quite a bit)...But you have kept the good wine until now.” And these people have the taste of it on their tongues...as they consider the unexpected. It opens up some possibilities.” You have saved the good wine until the last” it’s the servants to whom it is fully revealed. This will be a lifelong theme for Jesus – his affinity, his compassion, his solidarity with the poor. There is a whole theology called liberation theology – the cornerstone of it is just this: God’s preferential option for the poor. The servants see the miracle for what it is.

The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr said: “Almost always, the creative dedicated minority has made the world better.” There is a perspective you see, when you are not blinded by your own privilege, a perspective on what is happening in the world, and who bears the costs, who benefits from a miracle.

What also stands out for me (and this may be as much to do with where I am in my own life with young-adult children) is how well Mary knows her boy. Like a lot of parents, she doesn’t know the when and the how of it, but she knows who her boy is, and what is in his heart.

Mary says to Jesus, as any of us as guests at a wedding might comment: oh...they ran out of coffee...: here: “they have no wine.

Jesus: “What concern is that to you and to me?”

They both address the servers:

Mary says: “Do whatever he tells you.”

Jesus says: “Fill the jars with water.”

It was water. And then it wasn’t. It is a surprise beginning to his ministry.

I hear in it the echo of one of Jesus’ own later teaching parables about a woman who petitions an unjust judge, and he gives in to her because she is so relentless, he makes a decision for justice, because her momentum simply overcomes him. It is easier to decide the case than to continue to put up with her putting up with him. The point being you can petition God that way. You and force justice because it is already on its way, God is already extending a cup of blessing to the world. You can serve the cup.

Like many of you, one of the silver linings of the pandemic for me has been more family time. My adult children have been reminiscing with us about their earliest memories. My

youngest daughter said that her first memory was watching me go out into the yard where our cat had caught a bird and I demanded that the cat drop the bird. She said the cat obeyed, she dropped the bird, which flopped on the grass at first and then... flew away, unharmed.

Wow. That's quite a story. And so interesting to me that while that happened (and happened many times, in fact) no one else in the family would recount the story that way. The rest of us were old enough to remember the backstory.

I am not magic, and it didn't seem like a miracle to me at all.

When we bought the house which was before she was born, it had been standing empty for several months before we moved in. There were mice. We got a rescue cat to catch the mice. But the cat was traumatized in her previous home. After many weeks hiding from us, we were able to coax her out to join the family. My husband taught her to hunt by showing her the mouse he had caught in a trap. That was all it took. After being clueless, she became a genius mouser – she got them all, and then she went on and killed every mole in our lawn, which we weren't expecting, but we didn't mind at all. But then she took it too far. Outside, she started catching other things, frogs, bats, endangered species – the flying squirrel incident slayed me. The day I saw her with a baby eastern cottontail rabbit, I couldn't take it any more. Without thinking it through, I just went out and made her drop the rabbit. It was sheer force of will. I was surprised it worked. Which then led to me stopping her from killing other things, like songbirds. I became involved in a struggle with the cat with her own nature. And somewhere along this period, Noelle was old enough to see the spectacle of her mother going out and saving wildlife from the jaws of a domestic cat. I certainly did not save all of the animals, but I did save some. (And I have since repented of owning outdoor cats, and our current cat stays indoors only.)

Noelle's perspective has caused me to reflect on the years leading up to this first miracle of Jesus' at the wedding of Cana. Years we do not have a record of. What had happened in Jesus' heart? What injustices had Jesus been witness to? What human suffering in his community had he grown up with? What was he ready to stop tolerating? (Like I just would not abide the death of an eastern cottontail bunny in front of my own eyes.) How had Jesus been witness to how the workers in the fields and vineyards were treated for their efforts? Who was important to him, and how did the rest of the world value the women who fed him, the elderly who cared for him, the other children in his home? Why would he want to bless a wedding celebration which was taking a turn for the worse when they ran out of food? Giving them a gift, a few more hours to celebrate and enjoy themselves. A miracle comes from a long previous meditation on righting what we know has gone wrong in the world.

You may not turn water into wine, but I know lots of you work your own miracles all the time.

- Just this week I took a beautifully crafted prayer shawl to someone in hospice care. An entire ministry made that possible, involving many talented people right here.
- Many of us have had the coronavirus in this pandemic, but so many of you have stopped its spread also.
- So many of us have been careful to reduce our carbon footprint. And yes, this already matters, the world is already improved by your efforts.
- During this pandemic the Black Lives Matter movement has shone a light on how those who are vulnerable are being treated by institutions meant to serve and protect us all. And while it has been a painful view, this is how things change. And they are changing, so many are already fairing so much better because of these changes. Because we know, we can take action.

Jesus gives us a taste of the kind of Messiah he will be. Jesus takes ordinary objects they have had right there all along, and transforms the water into wine; the emptiness into rejoicing; he transforms those without, to those with abundance. He is not just overcoming an embarrassing moment, he invites us to see possibilities, and with him, to accept the opportunities available.

One of my favorite quotes from the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is a kind of definition of faith and how we work towards goals which seem unattainable: "Faith is taking the first step, even when you don't see the whole staircase."

Mary had full confidence that her son would act when he was ready, she even made sure the servants were ready for it: "Do whatever he tells you." They are ready for that miracle.

What about you? Can you taste it? You are laying the groundwork for a miracle already. This week, take the next step. Whether it is just a step, or the moment when your cup overflows with blessing.

Questions for reflection and conversation:

Do you have an area in your life right now where you are laying groundwork for change?

How would you advise someone else who wants to work for social justice?

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