

Epiphany 2C, 2010

Text: John 2:1-11

Title: The First Miracle

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Today in Cana of Galilee, Jesus performs His first miracle. Last week He was baptized, and this week He begins His work.

When you think about it, this is a strange miracle for Jesus' first. Jesus is at a party, they run out of booze, and so Jesus makes more. According to the head steward, the guests have already had so much to drink, that they wouldn't know the difference between the good wine and the cheap stuff.

So why does Jesus make more wine? And why is this His first miracle?

You'd think that Jesus would choose something a little more spectacular for His first miracle, or at least something a little more compassionate.

In fact, some folks in the Early church wondered what it would be like if Jesus had done other miracles earlier in His life. What would Jesus' life have been like as baby?

So they wrote some stories, kind of like ancient fan fiction about Jesus as a child. In one story baby Jesus' bath water cures a girl of leprosy. In another Jesus causes water to spring up out of the ground in the desert of Egypt. In yet another Jesus and his little playmates are making animals out of clay, and the birds that Jesus makes come to life and fly away.

These are the sorts of miracles you expect from Jesus- curing the sick, providing water for the thirsty and creating new life. Not making wine. This is a strange choice for His first miracle.

And consider this. Jesus is at the wedding with His mother. His father Joseph is noticeably absent. You only hear about Jesus and His mother.

Joseph has probably died by now. If not yet, we know that Joseph had died by the time of Jesus' crucifixion, as Jesus commends His mother into the care of John.

Can you imagine what it must have been like for Jesus and His family to experience Joseph's death? Jesus could have healed him. Jesus could have raised him from the dead. But Jesus didn't.

Can you imagine what it must have been like for Mary? She knew that Jesus could do miracles. Do you think she asked and pleaded with Jesus to do something, to save her husband?

Why would Jesus change water into wine, but not save his own father?

We often wonder why Jesus does some miracles and not others. Why does He heal some and not others? Why does He bless some and not others?

When we see some people healed, but our friends and family members don't get better, we wonder why God doesn't send a miracle our way.

This week we've heard all about the death and destruction in Haiti. Some folks survived and made it out alive, but others did not. A Lutheran seminarian and his wife were on a mission trip in Haiti. When the earthquake struck, the building that they were in collapsed. She made it out alive. Her husband did not.

Why some and not others?

That's really not the best question to ask. That's the sort of question Jesus got asked on the cross. Why did you save others, but not yourself? Why didn't Jesus come down from the cross and save Himself?

When faced with these questions, we do well to learn from Mary and how she handled this situation. Mary is our model.

First, Mary let Jesus know the situation. "They have no more wine." Of course, Jesus knows this, too. If you've ever been to a party when they've run out of refreshments, it's hard to keep it a secret. But Jesus knows everything, so whether it's obvious to all the guests, or if the hosts have been able to keep it a secret, Jesus knows it.

So when Mary tells Jesus about the wine, she's not just giving Jesus information that He doesn't have. She's implying that He should do something. Mary wants Jesus to fix the problem.

Jesus recognizes this and wants to know why this is His concern. "Why are you bothering me about this? It's not my responsibility."

Remember that Mary has never seen Jesus do a miracle. She's never seen Him do anything like what He's about to do. But she knows that Jesus can. Mary has faith. It's been thirty years, and Mary still believes that her Son is special and that He can help in this situation.

Faith prays, and places the situation in God's hands. God is free to do His will.

So Mary speaks again, this time to the servants. "Do whatever He tells you," Mary tells the servants. And that's it. Those are the last recorded words of Mary in all of Scripture. "Do whatever He tells you."

Miraculously, the servants do. They listen to Mary and they obey Jesus. He's not the one in charge of the banquet. But Jesus speaks with authority, and the servants obey.

Jesus tells the servants to do something that doesn't make a whole lot of sense- fill six large jars with water and bring some for the chief steward to taste. But they obey and the result is the best of wine.

The result of the story is faith. The disciples catch a glimpse of who Jesus is and what He's capable of. And they believe in Him. Just like Mary.

We know the disciples believe because John tells us. He was there. He tasted the wine.

We know that Mary believed because of what she says. Mary believes even before she tastes the wine.

So listen once more to Mary.

“They have no more wine.”

“Do whatever He tells you.”

Those are the two things we learn from Mary today. And they are the best way for us to handle difficult situations.

First, let Jesus know what the problem is. “They have no more wine.” I've got cancer. I lost my job. I had a fight with my wife. I'm worried about my kids. I messed up again.

Jesus already knows. He knows what we need even before we ask it. But it's good for us to tell Him about it.

Prayer is an expression of faith. When we pray, we bring our needs before the Lord, and we trust that He can actually do something about them.

It's not automatic. Jesus does not give us everything we ask for. Imagine if you raised a child and gave them everything they asked for. No, Jesus gives us what is best, and what is in accordance with His will.

Prayer is not a way of forcing God to do our will, it is placing everything in God's hands and saying, “Thy will be done.” Even when we don't understand or can't comprehend it.

After we pray, we hear Mary's other phrase, “Do whatever He tells you.”

Often in prayer, we reverse this. “Do whatever I tell you,” we say to God. We want a god who will obey us, listen to us, and do our will.

Instead, faith does what Jesus tells us to do. Even when it doesn't make a lot of sense – like bring a glass of water to the boss to drink.

But when we do what Jesus asks, when Jesus' words are alive and at work among us, the result is a miracle.

By itself baptism seems silly. What good will it do to pour a little water on someone's head? But combined with the word of God, it's a miracle- new birth, new life, salvation.

By itself the Lord's Supper seems silly. What good will it do to eat a piece of bread and take a sip of wine. But combined with the word of God, it's a miracle- body, blood, life, salvation.

Jesus' words bring life and joy. To the couple who were celebrating their wedding, Jesus brings wine.