

May the words of my mouth...

There is a Nigerian folk tale of a great annual feast that was taking place in a village. And the leader of the village put the invitation out for all the heads of families to attend. "The food will be provided but each head of family must bring a jug of palm wine." Now one of the heads of family, Ezra, wanted very much to go to the great festival but couldn't find any decent wine. He paced the floor trying to find a solution to his problem. Finally it came to him. "With all those attending each with a jug of wine, I will carry water in my jug. What will it hurt to add one jug of water to the great vat of wine?" You know where this is going right?

On the day of the great feast, the drums called the families to the feast. All came dressed in their finest, each entered the grounds and poured their jug of wine into a large earthen pot. Ezra carefully poured his container into the pot, greeted the head table, and joined the dancers. When all the guests had arrived, the leader commanded the music to stop and ordered the servers to fill everyone's glass with wine from the common vat. He spoke the opening words, and all the guests raised their glasses and drank not wine but water.

I tell you that story not only because it is obviously the polar opposite story to the gospel reading this morning but also because it is so obviously a metaphor. That never actually happened right? But it happens all the time. That's the beauty of a folk tale. So often we humans mistakenly think our contribution doesn't really matter, our wine is not of value, our light is so small it won't make a difference.

Well the gospel reading is beautifully jam packed with folk tale style metaphor and meaning irrespective of whether or not it actually happened.

Let's walk our way through it.

It begins: “On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee.” The third day? The third day since what? This is the second chapter of John and so far in the story it has been all about John the Baptist preparing people for the coming Messiah. John has pointed him out and some of his disciples along the sea of Galilee have started to follow him. There is no clue about the third day reference..., except that if you are familiar with the story at all, the third day rings a bell. There is that other third day, a resurrection day. Hm. Things happen on third days. Let’s keep going.

The mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” 4 And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” Wait a minute. He calls his mother “woman?” Is he just hopelessly sexist? Why would he do that? Why wouldn’t he say, “Mom, what has this to do with you and me?” But he doesn’t. He calls her the generic “woman.” But hang on. That rings a bell too. There’s another time that he calls her “woman.” From the cross his mother is there with a beloved disciple and he says “Woman, here is your son.” And he says to the disciple, “here is your mother.” Not sure what that means but I don’t think its an accident. And he also says “my hour has not yet come.” What’s he talking about. What hour? That kind of rings a bell too.

Well actually in John’s gospel he says that all the time. Clearly he’s not really talking about chronological time, but momentous time. This is not his big moment. This is not his hour. It is not yet time for his 15 seconds of fame. And once again, at the end of his life, in the garden, when they come to arrest him he says, “This is the hour, and the power of darkness.” This story at the beginning of his ministry seems to be packed with code words for the other end of his ministry. Third day. Woman. Hour. Let’s keep going.

5 His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” 6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. 9 When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.”

Ok. So what’s up with the wine? Why is it such a big deal if you run out of wine? And the wine doesn’t run out. It gives out- like the whole wedding celebration was resting on the foundation of the wine and when it gave out, the whole thing came tumbling down. And Jesus- seriously. Fill up 6 vats, each holding 20-30 gallons? That’s a lot of wine. And not just any old wine. This is fine wine. This is, like, Wine Spectator 95 points wine. And you serve the good wine first so that whatever people can remember at the end of the party, at least they will remember that first glorious sip of wine.

In the bible, wine is a code word for celebration. Wine is a metaphor for the good life. And the wedding banquet is a frequent image for the celebration that comes when we are set free. So for the wine to give out, the hope of a future has run dry. But at this wedding, it is revealed that Jesus is the one, the source of hope, the light of God. The one in whom hope has returned.

And finally, “Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”

In much of the gospels, Jesus is known for miracle: the sick are healed, the disturbed are calmed, the suffering is relieved. But John doesn’t call this a miracle,

he calls it a sign. This water-into-wine moment doesn't so much change the fate of things but rather it reveals the reality of things. John the Baptist said, "I am not the light but I am here to bear witness to the light, the true light that came into the world is here." And here is the first sign that he is that light. It has all the markers. Don't you see? Third day, Wedding feast failure, no wine then water becomes wine, I mean abundant wine, and not just any wine but fine wine. It's a sign. He's the one. And people began to believe and began to follow.

I want to go back to the story that Allie told, "The Big Orange Splot." Bear with me. Remember Mr Plumbean and his wild house. Great little story, and the moment in that story when things really turn around is when the neighbor doesn't just react to Mr. Plumbean's weirdness, but sits down with him over a glass of lemonade and they talk about it. And he realizes that he too has dreams for his house that have been sitting there all along, lying dormant within him and he kind of knew it but didn't really believe it. And the change that happens is that the dreams wake up, and he starts to believe that life could be different. And one by one, once they believe they start to follow and then things really start to change.

So it is with wine, and with love, and with the light of God and with the gospel. It is a one by one thing, and the transformation begins with believing that it could be different, that God's light really is here, that you do have something to offer, that you are a part of something bigger. One by one, as the gift we bring is awakened, that watery little gift is revealed to actually be wine, actually good wine and a critical part of the celebration of life. That is how life is renewed, how the church reawakens, how we take our place in God's great work on this, the third day, a day when things begin to change because we believe and because we follow.

Amen.