

The Second Sunday after Epiphany
January 16, 2022
The Rev. Jedediah D. Holdorph
Trinity Episcopal Church, Bend

Isaiah 62:1-5
Psalm 36:5-10
1 Corinthians 12:1-11
John 2:1-11

You've heard the rhyme: something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue. That's old-fashioned advice for brides. It's supposed to bring good fortune.

There's an alternative rhyme out there: something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue, **something goes wrong, something's askew.**

I've never offered that counsel, but I have offered a similar sort of warning before virtually every wedding I've had the privilege of presiding over. Weddings rarely go EXACTLY to plan, I'll tell the couple, something will likely go wrong: I'll flub a line, mispronounce a name, forget to ask a question. Or one of them will forget something or say something unintended. Or someone will drop a ring ... or the string that attaches the rings to the little pillow will get snarled up in a knot. (I speak from experience!)

I tell them this not to alarm them, but so that when it happens, we might all relax enough to enjoy the moment. It doesn't matter in the end, the marriage will still be recognized by the state (and by God). Rather than being deadly serious about getting everything right, we'll be better off looking for humor and joy in the midst of life's unexpected twists and turns.

That's the perspective I take into my hearing of today's gospel. Relax and enjoy it. There's serious stuff going on, but we're well-served to look for humor and especially for joy.

Mary, it seems, is the first to notice when the wine runs out. I wonder why. Maybe she was just the first to have an empty glass. More likely, she was just sensitive to the scandal of it all. She knew first-hand what it was like to be the "talk of the town" and wanted to save this new couple the trauma of what she had known.

In any event, she tells Jesus (clearly expecting to do something). And Jesus sasses her. "So what?" he says, "That is NOT my problem ... And it's not yours either, Ma."

But she ignores his remark completely. (Did she give him a withering look?) She ignores Jesus' reply and tells the servants to go ahead and do whatever Jesus tells them to do. And, of course, that's what they do. Jesus sees six stone jars set aside for ceremonial washing, and puts them to another use. He tells the servants to fill the stone jars with water, which is what they were made for. And then he tells them to draw some out, and it comes out wine, which is NOT what they were made for. Ah, but there's a gospel lesson: ritual purity won't gladden the heart, it seems; washing up isn't going to get the job done; it takes something stronger.

The servants take this new wine to the chief steward, oblivious this whole time to the looming crisis and all the shenanigans. And the chief steward, in turn, doesn't know what to make of it. He pulls the groom aside, either to express his confusion or to take the groom to task. It makes no sense, he says, to hold on to the good stuff while everyone drinks so much that they couldn't tell the difference between Costco's house red and a good Cabernet. What's going on here?

And so the bride and the groom, their family, and all the guests have the finest wine to drink. And not just enough, but more than they need – an additional 1,000 bottles of additional wine." And it's the best money cannot buy.

And when all is said and done, John tells us the point of telling us about *this* Jesus:

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

That's the first sign of glory, the fundamental expression of holiness, a glimpse at how life should look with Jesus in the mix. "... and the disciples believed in him." I'm struck by those final words: ... and his disciples believed in him.

Believing, as it's used here, must mean something more what they thought about Jesus. It must mean that they began to trust that Jesus had something to show them about God and about life.

I think "believing" in Jesus, in this circumstance, starts with noticing what others seem to miss.

It doesn't seem to have made much of an impact on anyone else. Most folks – the chief steward, the bride and the groom, the other wedding guests – were all, it seems, oblivious to what had just happened. Mary, even though she started the ball rolling, seems to have lost interest the moment she turned the problem over to Jesus. And the servants, though they did the heavy lifting, don't seem to understand what was happening.

It starts by noticing that Jesus could have provided just enough wine for the party to go on respectably long enough. But Jesus goes way, way beyond expectations to provide more wine – and better wine – that they ever could have expected.

Rick Morley, an Episcopal priest and writer draws the following conclusion:

There's a horrible mistake been made when "religion" and "church" are words synonymous with "boring," and "lifeless." Yes, of course there are things to be serious about, and there need to be moments of great solemnity in our common spiritual life.

But, the Kingdom of God is like a party. A feast. With fine food and well-aged wines. That's the very opposite of boring and lifeless.

And this is why Jesus does what he does at the wedding feast at Cana ...

“Boring-Jesus,” “lifeless-Jesus” would have said, “Great. Now that the wine is gone, the party is over. We can all leave, go home, and get down to serious business. I didn’t want to be here anyway.”

But, no. That’s not the Jesus that we have. ⁱ

Believing in Jesus must include coming to see that life is supposed to be celebrated, not merely lived. That’s no small point. Wash your hands, sure, but don’t miss the party!

They may have noticed that Jesus didn’t do it alone. If it hadn’t been for Mary, the wedding feast would have ended abruptly ... and ended badly. And it’s the servants who do the work, who pour the water and set out the wine. Without them, none of this would have happened.

And the disciples may have noticed that ordinary people working with the ordinary stuff of life have something to do with manifesting glory, with disclosing what holiness looks like, what life is supposed to be like.

The disciples saw it all – and caught a glimpse of God and life. They believed in Jesus, and that’s how Jesus could begin to show them what God looks like – a generous God who cares about our daily struggles. And that’s how Jesus could begin to show them that God intends life to look like more like a celebration for one and for all (and less like the struggle it is for too many people forced to go it alone).

Which begs the question of what it means for us who are invited to believe in Jesus in our own day. I think, in part, it means that we – with those first disciples that day – are invited to pay closer attention to what goes on in the world around us than is customary, looking for glimpses into the nature of God.

If God is a vengeful God, heaven help us all in this cold, hard world. If God is a stingy God, we’ll need to scramble for every crumb we can get. But if instead, as we see at this wedding feast in Cana, God is a generous God, heaven *will* help us all.

And if God delights in keeping the party going, then abundance is the way of life for us to receive and to share with one and with all.

And I think believing in Jesus still has something to do with paying attention, looking for glory where others walk blindly oblivious.

It’s an invitation, as one preacher once put it, to go on a “scavenger hunt of sorts, to look more carefully for God’s abundance ... in everyday places and circumstances.”

Several years ago, the *The Washington Post* conducted an experiment. They set up a camera on a cold January morning during rush hour in a metro station in Washington, DC. And then, Joshua Bell, a world-renowned violinist gave an unannounced concert. Like any street busker, he pulled his instrument out of its case – except his violin was valued at 3.5 million dollars! And he began to play.

After three minutes, one middle aged man noticed the musician and slowed his pace, stopping for a few seconds, and then hurried up to meet his schedule. A minute later, a woman gave him his first tip – a dollar bill tossed into his case as she passed by.

More than 1,000 people passed him by as he offered a free concert, almost all of them completely oblivious.

The one person who paid the most attention, it seems, was a three-year-old boy. His mother tugged him along, but the boy stopped to look at the violinist. Finally, the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk (but kept turning back his head all the time). And several other children did the same ... and their parents, without exception, forced them to move on.

He collected \$32 for his efforts. And when he finished playing and silence took over, no one seemed to notice. No one applauded. They hurried along, apparently all of them with places to go and things to do. ⁱⁱ

If we're too serious about staying on track with our plans, we might fail to notice beauty in our midst. If we're too deadly serious about getting everything right, we might miss the humor of life when things go wrong. And we might miss out on the joy offered us as things twist and turn beyond our control.

Blinded by the stress of a new wave of COVID or numbed by the never-ending weight of a pandemic that has challenged us for nearly two years, these lessons are especially true now. But it has always been true that the abundance of God's grace is easily missed, the generosity of God's gifts usually unnoticed.

Life is a scavenger hunt. Joy is the prize worth seeking. Love the gift worth sharing.

ⁱ Rick Morley @ <http://www.rickmorley.com/archives/2242>.

ⁱⁱ There are various iterations of the story, including the Pulitzer Prize *Washington Post* story mentioned on Joshua Bells website (<https://joshuabell.com/>). The best re-telling of the story I've found is the children's picture book, *The Man With the Violin – retold @* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ov_ZX6AK6-I.