

Trinity UMC
 Epiphany # 2—Sign of Wonder
 John 2: 2-22
 “Is It Time?”

SCRIPTURE READING

John 2: 2-22

Roberta

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and ² Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. ³ When the wine ran out, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They don’t have any wine.”

⁴ Jesus replied, “Woman, what does that have to do with me? My time hasn’t come yet.”

⁵ His mother told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶ Nearby were six stone water jars used for the Jewish cleansing ritual, each able to hold about twenty or thirty gallons.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water,” and they filled them to the brim. ⁸ Then he told them, “Now draw some from them and take it to the headwaiter,” and they did. ⁹ The headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine. He didn’t know where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew.

*The headwaiter called the groom ¹⁰ and said, “Everyone serves the good wine first. They bring out the second-rate wine only when the guests are drinking freely. You kept the good wine until now.” ¹¹ This was the **first miraculous sign** that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.*

SERMON

Is it Time?

Roberta

PRAYER

“They don’t have any wine”--- a short phrase from a Jewish mother to son on the third day of a wedding feast. Do you hear a question mark at the end of Mary’s comment to Jesus? As in they don’t have any wine, son, what are you going to do about it? In first century Palestine, running out of wine, even on the third day of the celebration is a wedding disaster.

My nephew got married on my brother’s farm in late September last fall. The day was gorgeous, the bride radiant, the groom handsome, and the outdoor setting on the farm magnificent. It was celebration of joining not just bride and groom but a bride who was born into a Swedish farming family and a groom from an Oregon farming family. Their pastor and her husband traveled from Sweden to Lebanon Oregon to celebrate and consecrate their marriage. It was truly a world as well as a wedding celebrations!

Large tents were set up for the reception and the food was catered and beautifully laid out. As in all weddings, some things do not go as planned. Following the wedding, after people had found their tables under the tents, the beautifully laid out buffet line was opened as the bride and groom were the first to go through.

I was one of the last one’s through—I had been chatting with people, helping Lynn take photographs and enjoying a glass of wine! When I went through the buffet line, there was still an abundance of food. However, shortly afterwards, while people were still feasting and celebrating, the caterers packed up all the food, put some of it in plastic bags and left them on the table.

I wanted another of the scrumptious filled mushrooms so was dismayed when the lovely buffet line had become an empty table with ziplock baggies filled with some

food. It seemed very weird to me and put a bit of a damper on the feasting and celebrating!

Much later in the evening, I found out that the caterers behavior was a surprise to the bride and all those who had planned the party. They did not ask—is it time to pack up? Is it time for the feast to be over? They simply packed up and left. Perhaps the caterers were in a rush to either get on to the next job or to get home.

Is it time?

In the gospel story from the mother of Jesus assumes that it is time and at first glance, Jesus tells her that the time is not right to reveal his identity- to reveal the signs of his power.

The Wedding of Cana is only found in the fourth gospel—John uses this unique story of the event to mark the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus. Each gospel uses different stories as the debut of Jesus acts. In the gospel of Matthew, a very long sermon, known as the ‘sermon on the Mount’ is the first thing that Jesus does—Matthew is about ‘teaching’. The gospel writer Mark uses the story of Jesus at the synagogue on the Sabbath in Capernaum when he exorcises a demon in the middle of worship to mark the beginning of Jesus ministry—Mark is about the healing! Next Sunday we will hear Luke’s version of Jesus first act when Jesus returns to his hometown crowd of Nazareth and reads the scripture for the day from Isaiah. Luke is about Jesus crossing boundaries. .

I wonder what it is about this story of Jesus and his mother at the wedding in Cana that is so compelling that the writer of John uses it to announce who Jesus is as well as what Jesus can do. John does not use the term ‘miracle’ to describe what Jesus

is doing but uses the term ‘sign’. In other words, the miracle itself of turning water into wine is not really what we are supposed to see, as miraculous as it is. What deeper reality of Jesus revealing through this act? What are we supposed to see about Jesus?¹ What are we supposed to learn about the interaction between Jesus and his mother, Mary?

The underlying question behind Mary’s comment about not having enough wine resonates with a question that I think we all may carry deep within ourselves. Will I have enough? Are we running out? How much is enough?

I know we have explored the myth of scarcity before but it seems that it is a message that keeps coming up in the gospel message of Jesus. The myth of scarcity is a current that runs deep within the culture of our nation, our world and our church, both local and global. Will there be enough?

I know that deep down in my own life, my ‘go to’ is to ask the question of Mary and to live my life like the caterers at my nephew’s wedding. Okay—that is accomplished—ready to move on to the next thing. We had enough food for the celebration so let’s pack up the leftovers and move ahead! Rather than seeing the abundance and the feasting that is occurring—rather than joining into the celebration—I am ready to move on.

As always, when confronted with the myth of scarcity Jesus offers unexpected and surprising abundance. *“Jesus as the one who embodies God, who shows us God, is one who shows us abundance”*.² Rather than preaching or teaching about the abundance, in this story from John, Jesus gives the wedding guests the experience of

¹ Karoline Lewis. Commentary of John 2: 1-11. Working Preacher website

² Rev. Anne Sutherland Howard. Sermon “finding Wild Space”

receiving abundance. There are six water jars, each 20-30 gallons – much too heavy to carry, that have been transformed into the best wine—not cheap wine that is expected at this time of the celebration but the best wine the wine steward had ever tasted.

“Is it Time?” Is it time to say no to the myth of scarcity and yes to the abundant way those Jesus examples in this story of the wedding feast?

The word ‘grace’ only occurs four times in the gospel of John, yet in the gospel stories, The signs of Jesus, show us what abundant grace is. When we begin to take the story of Christmas, the incarnation seriously, and live into it, we experience grace. We move from talking about grace to living in grace. .When we truly live our lives in the promise that the Word became flesh and lives among us, that we experience wat grace tastes like, looks like, smells like , sounds like and feels like.

Abundant grace tastes like the best wine you have ever tasted. Abundant grace feels like there are no limits to who to love. Abundant grace looks like a life filled to the brim with compassion.

Several weeks ago, Ryan shared an article on Facebook that I printed and have kept in my files. The article is about setting church goals for 2016 and is written by pastor named Tim Suttle. This article has resonated particularly because it blows away the myth of scarcity model that so often we live in within our denominational structures of the church.

He writes: *“Nearly every pastor or ministry leader I’ve ever met operates with the assumption that their job is to make their ministry successful. When leaders accept this premise and use it as a guiding principle, they allow the American Story of bigger,*

better, higher, faster, and stronger to dictate the terms of leadership over and above the life and teachings of Jesus.”³

He goes on to suggest that the result of setting specific goals of numbers in worship, small group attendance, is not church ‘growth’ but anxiety. *“Hard-driving church leaders create anxiety every where they go. The most consistent outcome of faithful leadership is human flourishing, not anxiety. In fact, focusing on faithfulness serves to drain the church community of anxiety.”*

He goes on to suggest some goals to set for a ‘faithful’ rather than a ‘successful’ church-

- Grow Deeper- not bigger: Pour yourselves into discipleship as a church
- Stop counting heads—stop believing that faithfulness can be equated with growth of numbers
- Stop using the word “success” – don’t try to be successful—be faithful
- When looking at ministry opportunities—stop using the term ‘is this effective’ and use a new question—‘what does faithfulness require of us right here and now?’

This all sounds good and I think that it moves us forward from living our lives based in a scarcity model of not having enough to living the grace that we have more than enough. Yet my friends, this week, I have an appointment with Jennifer to begin work on our statistical report that is due at the end of January to the denominational office of The United Methodist Church. I know that our ‘numbers’ for our Sunday morning worship attendance will be down this year. In our leadership team meeting last

³ Time Suttle. Church Goals. *HuffPostentry* 8883946

week, we learned that our pledges are down for the year, and that eleven people who were regular pledgers in 2015 have either moved or died in 2015.

The numbers that will go down in the statistical report do not measure our faithfulness as a church this past year. At our leadership team meeting last Saturday, we celebrated the faithfulness of God and each other in 2015. This is the list that we came up with:

- 1) activity fair
- 2) new design of website
- 3) ukulele band
- 4) nursery revamped
- 5) new associate pastor
- 6) growth of Messy Church
- 7) sound system upgrade
- 8) follow through of prescriptions and mission statement
- 9) R & C team
- 10) hosting Girl Scouts
- 11) growth in rental income
- 12) homeless issue of two camping families in fall of 2015 resolved
- 13) neighborhood fair on Trinity UMC campus in August
- 14) 6 confirmands
- 15) 6 baptisms
- 16) \$12,00 raised for the roof fund
- 17) Maxwell Rd. Preschool enrollment up
- 18) deepened connections on leadership team with effective communications

What do you have to celebrate regarding how you have been faithful to God's call on your life this past year?

I celebrate the faithfulness of the communication task force—Courtney Helikson, Terry Griffin, Kristyn Stephens, Jennifer Williams, Greg Nelson, the communications director of the Oregon-Idaho UM conference, Judy Piercy, our consultation coach, and myself. WE began our work in December of 2014 but completed our work in 2015 and implemented our plan in 2015.

It is time to celebrate that God's grace is abundant—It is time to respond in faithfulness.

I celebrate the work of what was the Prescription 2 b task force in 2015. Led by Dave Chavez, the others on the group, Crystal Mills, Amanda Wooldridge, Bryn Wooldridge, Caelyn Wooldridge, Loretta Wolfenbargar, Marcia Claypool, and Shirley Carpenter who began to meet, to dream, to pray and to discuss a process of providing opportunities for people from Trinity to form deeper relationships with each other. From these first meetings, they have had two activity fairs , the third coming up the final Sunday of this month. When they completed the task force work, several left the work and others joined to become the Relate and Connect Team—Dave, Crystal, Loretta, Lorraine Robinson met with Ryan last Sunday after worship to discern how they are to be faithful to the call God has placed on their hearts to assist the people of Trinity UMC to grow deeper in their relationships with each other.

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I celebrate the time, and energy and wisdom of the Executive leadership team of 2015 (Pat Rankin, Carolyn Loucks, Judy Mortimore, Phil Means and myself) We met at least every month to share pray and discern how God is leading us to be faithful. The work continues now with Judy leaving the group and Amanda Wooldridge saying yes to this important work.

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This past week, our Messy Church was highlighted in a video produced by rev. Lowell Greathouse, coordinator of Mission and Ministry for Oregon-Idaho Conference. There is a link to the video on our website—I encourage you all to look at the video that was shot at our December Messy Church.

It is time to celebrate that God's grace is abundant—It is time to respond in faithfulness.

Most of all today, I celebrate YOU—each and every one of You. You are all expressions of God's love. I have had so many individual and spiritually deep conversations over coffee at Starbucks, in my office, at a hospital bed or at a home planning for a celebration of life over this past year. Companionship with you as you hear God speak and call you to trust is the most awesome part of my job as pastor.

It is time to celebrate that God's grace is abundant—It is time to respond in faithfulness.

So today, as we celebrate the story of the wedding of Cana, let us reflect on the abundance of grace we have experienced and trust that as we move into the unknown new year ahead of us that we will faithfully trust Jesus the Christ, who lives here, among us, to lead us in the next steps.

It is time to party- it is time to celebrate the abundance of God's grace. It is time to respond in faithfulness. Thanks be to God. AMEN