

## **“Why We Cannot Wait<sup>1</sup>”**

**John 2: 1-11**

**January 20, 2013**

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I think it is fair to say that if I was not a Christian, I may be persuaded to become one, when I learn that one of Jesus' first public acts was at a party turning water into wine. What a gift! To me, this is certainly an affirmation; that, it is God's will that as a Christian, I love a good party.

There are so many special things about celebrations. We focus on the positive things in life. They bring out the best in us. During Epiphany, we celebrate incarnation. Once the word becomes flesh, the rest of John's gospel shows us what grace tastes like. It is one thing to say that Jesus is the source of grace, but another is to experience it. The word became flesh, but what does it look like, feel like, taste like? To experience grace is like to experience a fine glass of wine.

I think that is significant to note that Mary prompts this sign, and perhaps it leads us to think about what had Mary noticed in her son that she believed that he could turn the water into wine. And while I can go into the importance of wine in a Jewish wedding during Jesus' time, I rather talk about what wine in a wedding means to us today. This event is considered one of the first signs of Jesus, and it certainly points us to who Jesus was and who he really is in our lives.

The experiences that we find in a wedding and in the sharing of wine embodied some of the best things in life.

Wine and a wedding give us:

*Undeniable sense of joy.* I think we have all been there. We have prepared to attend the wedding. We come in gift in hand and well dressed. Hopefully, we are inspired by the ceremony, but when we get to the reception, we sit down to enjoy and celebrate. Once we have a glass of wine and start listening to the music, it seems like all the worries of the world start melting away. Not long after that, we might find ourselves dancing the Electric Slide, the Cupid Shuffle, or even a little Salsa.

But, there is a similar experience with our relationship with Jesus. It is possible that many of you might know what it is like to come to God weighed down by burdens that would seem impossible to unload from our lives. But, we come to God and lay our burdens there. And, in knowing that through the cross we are reconciled, the knowledge of the forgiveness of our sins brings a sense of *undeniable joy*, relief, and freedom. We are now free to start again, to keep going, to rebuild aspects of our lives again. We are free to experience joy.

Another element induced by wine and wedding, *positivity about the future.* We look at the couple, full of love and hope. We are so inspired with the newness of the experience, by the possibilities ahead, that we start looking at our spouse or significant other again, in that moment, as if for the first time when we realized we were in love. And even if for that evening, any

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<sup>1</sup> Title of a Book written by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

disagreements or tensions just seem to go away. Because you are prompted to remember yourselves when you were the young couple in front of you, or if you are single, you are prompted to be hopeful for what is possible for you.

So, similarly, in Jesus, we are hopeful. We look at the empty tomb and are hopeful for the resurrection. Yes, we are hopeful in knowing that Jesus died, but he rose again. That no storm that we might be going through in our lives is more powerful than the finality of death, and yet, we know that we can overcome, because God is on our side. In Christ, we can face the road ahead with great optimism and with the assurance contained in hope.

Jesus begins his ministry in community and in joy. It is interesting for me to find that some commentaries may refer to this sign or miracle as one that is not useful. Perhaps because no one might have been healed or risen from the dead. But I think this sign points us to something and that is abundant grace and celebration.

It signals the super abundance in quality and quantity. Jesus does not only change water into wine, but it is the best wine. Jesus does not only bring life, but is abundant life. It is not more of the same, is qualitatively different—it will change your world. It is a picture of joy.

But, the Christian tradition has not always known to do with joy. What does it mean to be an intentionally joyful community?

I always say that instinctively, we are intimidated by joy. I have actually heard people say, “Don’t laugh too much, because that means you are going to cry much later.” Often, we are more comfortable sharing the negative than we are sharing joy. As a matter of fact, we are often annoyed by people who are too happy all the time. We called the cheerleaders...we make reference to them as “chipper, chipper, chipper.”

Sometimes, we might ask someone how they are doing, and if they are always positive, we lose interest. We will say things like “Oh...they’re fine.”

It has been known that sometimes we energized by drama. Hence, the success of the many reality shows today and the many soap operas in the past years.

But, what does it mean to become an *intentional* community of extravagant joy? I think a community of extravagant joy is one who is not waiting for everything to be perfect, to experience the reality of abundant grace. It’s one who does not wait to do right.

As a matter of fact, we cannot wait to be joyful. We cannot wait to feel gratitude for God’s abundance grace. I understand that, instinctively, we might be guided to look at the negative first, but this morning, I invite us to become a community of extravagant joy.

A community that says, yes, we have been through some things, but we are standing, we are here. God is still in our midst and we have experienced God’s abundant grace. We have not seen perfection, but we have seen grace. Yes, we have lost some things, but we have gain so many

more; and NO... we cannot wait for all to be perfect to experience joy. No, we cannot wait for the church to be full to celebrate. The time is now.

You know, tomorrow we celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, and it was from the Birmingham Jail that he wrote a letter that later became a book which he entitled "Why We Cannot Wait." It was in that book that he wrote the words, "Justice delayed is justice denied."

And this morning, we celebrate with the words of a prophet who did not wait for the laws to be just laws, in order for him to do justice. He did not wait for the oppressor to provide change. He demanded it -- because we cannot wait for justice to be done for us.

I often hear that we are in need of prophets again. We look for prophets, but I think that the prophets are among us already. We look for extraordinary signs, but perhaps it is a common occurrence that we find the promise of God on God's own time table.

So, I invite us to get up, and see perhaps what Mary saw in Jesus: That we are able to do it; that the time has come. I invite us to consider why we cannot wait..why we cannot wait to become a church of extravagant welcome and extravagant joy. Why we cannot wait and see what happens in another year. I invite us to wholeheartedly recognize that the time is now. The time is now to bring our gifts and put them in God's hands. Jesus has come into our midst, and he has made us participants of his abundant grace! What do we do now?

This morning, the reality that we are in does not compare to the realities of the time of Dr. King. Certainly the realities of this community of faith are different from those of his days. But, one thing is for sure: We cannot wait! Because if we do not rejoice now; if we do not grab hold of God's grace now in this our time, it is possible that we will be preventing future generations. I think of those who have come before us. They were good stewards, and they made great decisions to preserve many assets, so that today, we could enjoy the blessings of worshiping in this beautiful Meeting House in the middle of this beloved city. Today, we value having a balanced budget, we work hard at making decisions for future generations as well; but, what would it mean for us to be *preservationists of joy today?*

Center Church, it may not feel like it. But it is time.

May God lead us in understanding that this hour to do justice. May God lead us during our time to celebrate abundant grace, and to unapologetically be a community of extravagant joy! Let the world call us cheerleaders! Amen.