

## “Dirty Water”

A Sermon on John 2:1-11

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Our story this morning is a beloved one, isn't it? There have been times when you and I have looked into lesser known narratives or seemingly random and obscure texts and it's been fun to discover their hidden wisdom together. But today we have a good ol' classic. The wedding at Cana, of course, the story of Jesus' first miracle: turning the water into wine. Some of you have studied this story in various Bible Studies. Some of you have done magic tricks with VBS kiddos and food coloring. Maybe some of you even had this story shared during your own wedding ceremonies. There so much good stuff to draw out of this story. There are themes of hospitality and abundance, of joy and celebration, and the counter cultural notion that describes a kingdom where the last are first, the weak are strong, and the best wine is served last. There's also something interesting to observe about this mother son dynamic between Mary and Jesus. His hesitation, her insistence... there's family systems theory written all over this one.

And although it might be a quite familiar text, with fresh eyes and open ears, we can perhaps find something new to treasure in the story once again or even for the very first time. For me, returning to the texts. and finding new meanings is what a *Living* Word is all about. It is how God is still speaking, like we say in the United Church of Christ. This morning it my privilege to share with you what I've been thinking about this text this week.

You know how people use the phrase, “Money is the root of all evil?” When actually, that’s a misquote, an omission. Because really, it’s “The Love of Money is the root of all evil.” Which sounds different. Means something new. Right? We do this with little silly things like song lyrics all the time, and unfortunately, we do it with big important things too. Like when we say the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment gave women the right to vote. When really, the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment gave *white* women the right to vote. Which sounds different. Means something new. Right? Or when we say, “Lincoln freed the slaves”, instead of “Lincoln freed the slaves, but not in those states that didn’t succeed from the Union.” That means something else. See, I’ve been thinking about those omissions, large and small, this week as I’ve been pondering this text, our passage from John. And now I’ve got myself wondering if it sounds different and means something new when we don’t just say, “Jesus turned water into wine”, but rather “Jesus turned dirty water into wine.”

It all goes back to those six stone jars, and their intended purpose. In this case we don’t have to speculate or relay on a historical interpretation for information, our Gospel writer tells us exactly what they are there in the text when it says that they are the containers for the Jewish rites of purification. Remember, purifications, the purity codes that we can read about in the Old Testament, were an integral part of daily Jewish life. This is the Law of Moses. This is Leviticus stuff, right? Where we have learned that cleanliness, and limiting the spread of germs was of high import to the Judean people. For whom indeed, ‘cleanliness was next to Godliness’. These stone jars were for the wedding guests to wash their hands in – and not just symbolically with a sprinkle or a tiny dip, but actually wash their hands in, before they would partake of the wedding feast. So just think about that. Lots of guests, people who have been traveling

to Cana for the big day, traveling by foot that is, and with livestock, in the desert, attending to their bodily functions, as needed, of course and then needing to obediently wash up before dinner. These jars were utilitarian. Not ancient centerpieces. Not filled with water for drinking. And since the guests had already consumed all the wine that was anticipated, we know that the party was in full swing with many guests. And so, inside those jars... well it wasn't exactly Evian, if you know what I mean. Then note that in the text there is emphasis on "do what he tells you". As in they do what he tells them to do. Which was to fill the jars. Not empty and scrub out the stone jars. Not get clean jars from the kitchen. But simply fill *those* jars.

So, like I said, Jesus didn't just turn water into wine. He turned *dirty* water into wine. Dirty water, used water, done water, water that was to be discarded, waste water and maybe you can see where I am going with this, because people... what won't God use! Seriously, what won't God use? Dirty Water. Barren Wombs. A Lowly stable. Dry Bones. And a whole lot of people the world gave up on: lepers and widows and prostitutes. What won't God use? And then not only that, but also what won't God do? Because, let's face it, it would have been good enough to turn that dirty water into wine, but God doesn't stop there. Our God, though Christ our Lord, turns that dirty water into the best wine. The best. What can't God use? What can't God do? Amen?

I've known some dirty water, even in regard to this very text. Right now I am in an exciting stretch of life, getting ready to graduate from Eden Seminary and you may have even hear that I have a job prospect waiting for me this summer. But it wasn't always lie this. I almost didn't go to seminary at all because of this passage, and the other stories about wine in the New Testament. August 15 is the application deadline for Eden

Seminary, and two consecutive August 15ths came and went and found me sulking around the house like the girl who didn't get asked to the prom. As the sun set on those nights it was inevitable. I didn't go to seminary again this year. Among the many things I had to sort out first was this theological hang up I had about wine. I didn't know how I could ever authentically hold up a chalice of wine at the Lord's Supper and pronounce it 'blessed' knowing what I have known and loving the people I have loved who have a different testimony about wine. How could I ever faithfully preach this text about giving drunk people more alcohol and pronouncing it miraculous when I can tell you stories about some children in our city for whom drunk people drinking more wine is certainly not an abundant blessing in their precious, tiny eyes. And so, I figured it was a career hazard, a conflict of interest, and stayed far away from seminary. But God kept Calling, and eventually, I did 'whatever he told me to do'. You see God knew who God was calling when he called this alcoholic to the pulpit, just like Jesus knew exactly what was floating in those jars when he ordered the servants to fill em up, and just like God knows all about the dirty water in your own life. The stuff you've totally given up on. The stuff you see no value in. The stuff you aren't talking to God about. God already knows all about that stuff and is ready and able to make transformations in your life. Whatever your dirty water, barren womb, or dry bones are, that is the raw material for the divine in your life. That's our creator God's favorite medium. He's a found object artist, right Cynthia? A divine recycler so talented that your dirty water can be transformed into finest vintage. Your very best. Your miracle to tell. No matter how far gone or what the before picture looks like, God's after pic exceeds our wildest expectations. This is how God works. This is redemption. Miraculous right? But what the catch?

Well, it not a catch. It's a command, really. And that is to do whatever he tells you to do. How is God calling you to be in transformation? To be in co creation with him to make all things new? Remember, you have an ancient covenant with God, to be good stewards, which might mean cleaning up your dirty water. You also have a responsibility, by way of your baptism, to be disciples and followers of a miracle maker, which means you ought to be working some miracles yourself. Maybe you are rusty at turning dirty water into wine, but I bet you can make some miracles nonetheless. You could save three lives by donating blood this week. You could grab one of those freezer meals put together by Loaves and Fishes team on your way out of here and deliver it to someone you know that might not otherwise have a homecooked meal. You can go home and love your family, like Mother Theresa commanded us to do.

There is an abundance of what you can do you can do, but here's something not to do. Don't pray for a miracle. I know you might not expect me to say that, so maybe I'll revise that phrase and say, "don't *just* pray for a miracle". You'll notice, no one in our story prayed for this miracle. That's not how it worked. That's not how any of this works! The people in our story were all up IN the miracle: the servants, Mary, the bridegroom. You be a part of a miracle too. Do whatever he tells you to do, then expect to be transformed. Expect the dirty water to become the finest vintage and remember, there's nothing that God won't use, just like there is nothing God can't do, just like there is no one God doesn't love. And that my friends, is today's lesson in miracles. Amen.