



From the Pulpit: January 23, 2022

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time—Communion Sunday

The Reverend Dr. William A. Evertsberg

John 2:1–11

The Impossible Possibility for an Impossible Time, III: In Every Glass of Common Water, Hints of Garnet-Gold

The wedding was only the beginning.

Ever since it has been miracle:

Touching the shoreline of the other in our sleep,

Waking warm beneath our roof,

Hoing the wheat shoots in our fields.

Our union was not singular;

we fought

*And sulked, sickened like the
other folk.*

*But in every glass of common
water,*

*We tasted hints of gar-
net-gold.*

Kathy Coffey, The Cana
Couple Reminisce

According to the Gospel of John, the wedding at Cana is Jesus’ debut on history’s stage. This is what gets him noticed at the beginning.

They run out of wine at a wedding in Cana where Jesus and Mother Mary are guests. I don’t know why Mary thinks the empty bar is her problem to solve, but in any case, she presses her inimitable son into service.

There were six stone water jars at the Cana Hilton; each stone jar could hold 25 gallons. So Jesus turns 150 gallons of common well water into a plush,

garnet King David cabernet sauvignon with a pungent nose and a long finish that would get a 98 from *Wine Spectator*. That’s four more bottles for every single guest! Have you ever been to a wedding that was that well-lubricated?

“You and I, we’ve received a miracle, multiple miracles. We have so much. We are of all people most blessed. Therefore, don’t be so snippy all the time.”

It seems to Katie and Christine and me that the Christ-like virtues have never been quite as intensely necessary as right now during this impossible time of pandemic and racial discord and political divisiveness. There is a “persistent hum of incivility.”

The other day a flight from Miami to London was 500 miles out over the Atlantic when it had to turn around and go back to Miami because one woman refused to wear a mask. She probably made a hundred people a day late.

One woman noticed that at the grocery store or the drug store or on an airplane, when people are mean, they’re a heck of a lot meaner. “Instead of saying ‘This really inconvenienced me,’ they say, ‘What the hell is wrong with you?’ It’s a different scale of mean.¹ Yes? A different scale of mean.

¹ Sarah Lyall, “A Nation on Hold Wants to Speak With a Manager, *The New York Times*, January 1, 2022. Bottom of Form

So what do we learn about virtue from Jesus in this story of the Wedding at Cana? How is this God's word for us today? Well I know some of you are thinking it, so I'll just say it for you. It means "More wine!"

Yeah that might not be what God's trying to teach us in this story. Alcohol purchases jumped 54% during the first week of the pandemic, and over the last two years, alcohol consumption is up 14%. Massachusetts General warns us that over time, this will lead to 8,000 additional deaths and 18,000 additional liver failures.²

So maybe that's not what we're supposed to learn from this story. How about this? Jesus shows up to **all** our weddings. At **all** our weddings, or at least **most**, he turns common well water into a splendid ambrosia that has gladdened the human heart for 10,000 years. He takes the ordinary and makes it extraordinary. He takes the mundane and makes it sacred. He takes a happy friendship and turns it into undying love. He takes an unspoken agreement and turns it into a lifelong covenant.

One day ten years ago, or 20, or 40, or ten years from now, he drops to one knee and asks you to spend the rest of your life with him. "I will never leave you," he said. "I want to make babies with you," he said. "If you are away from me for 24 hours, I will be stricken and bereft," he said. "If cancer stalks, I will help you fend it off," he said.

One day ten years ago, or 20, or 40, or ten years from now, you drop to one knee, and, miracle of miracles, she says "Yes!" "Till death do us part," she said. "I will laugh at all your jokes, even the stupid ones," she said.

² These statistics are all over the web and in any case are extremely flexible and contradictory, but for what it's worth, I got my information from the Massachusetts General website and JAMA.

"When you weep, I will dry your tears," she said. "If you forget my name, I will never forget you," she said. That's a miracle. That's water morphed to wine.

You've seen this Tik Tok meme that's everywhere right now. A woman drinking a huge glass of red wine, and the voice from off-camera says, "What are you drinking?" And she says, "Water." He says, "It looks like wine." She looks at her glass and says, "Good Lord, he's done it again!" Good Lord, he **has** done it again.

Maybe it didn't work out for you. Maybe you fell out of love, or he did. Maybe someone else came along. Was it not nonetheless God's gift to you? You were in love once. If you had to do it over again, would you do it differently?

Maybe you never married. You still have your person. You still have your BFF. You still have love. You haven't run out of wine.

I know many of you read Annie Lamott's books, the hippie Presbyterian with dreadlocks from the Bay Area? A couple of years ago, Annie Lamott got married for the first time at the age of 65.

She resisted the idea of a lifelong covenant for over 60 years, but then she went on this dating site for people over 50 and she noticed this tall, handsome guy, so they went out for coffee and it went well and Annie fell in love so hard it was insane, she says. "I felt like I was mentally ill," she says.

Her new husband Neil says that Anne Lamott is the funniest person he has ever met. Being married to her is like living inside a comedy sketch.

Anne Lamott says there are advantages to waiting till 65 to get married. She says, "You know this is going to be your toe-tag husband."

"Gratitude and Humility embrace. Because there are two kinds of people in the world: The Entitled and the Blessed."

And then she gives us some advice, “Never give up, no matter how things look or how long they take. Don’t quit before the miracle.”³ I think that’s wise, don’t quit before the miracle.

You and I, we’ve received a miracle, multiple miracles. We have so much. We are of all people most blessed. Therefore, don’t be so snippy all the time.

We who have so much owe it to the universe to pay it forward. If you pay attention to what you **have**, you won’t have time to notice what you **lack**. If you remember that you are loved and loved and loved, by God and by God’s people, you won’t show your hateful face on the flight or at school board meeting.

Grateful people don’t have a hissy fit when someone asks them to wear a mask. Grateful people don’t throw a toddler tantrum when they can’t find the right cheese at Whole Foods.

Have you noticed that Gratitude and Humility are adjacent virtues? Gratitude and Humility embrace. Because there are two kinds of people in the world: The Entitled and the Blessed. Some of us think we are entitled to the good things in our lives, a good spouse, a good home, a good job, charming children. We earned the good things in our lives. These are the kinds of people who produce that “persistent hum of incivility.”

Grateful people, on the other hand, are also humble people. They know they are blessed, not entitled. They know they’ve received miracle upon miracle. They know that “life is gift, and birth windfall, and just to be here at all is sheer unmerited privilege.”⁴

³ Lois Smith Brady, “The Writer Anne Lamott Gets to the Happily-Ever-After Part,” *The New York Times*, April 26, 2019.

⁴ John Claypool, in a sermon preached at First Presbyterian Church, Atlanta, GA.

They’re too busy tallying up what they **have** to notice what they **lack**.

This story of the Wedding at Cana is here to remind us that ours is a God of unstinting largesse, sweeping charity, and reckless excess.

There are 8.7 million animal species on the planet. Or maybe it’s 100 million. Nobody knows, and no-

body ever will, but it’s at least 8.7 million. Only 1.2 million have been identified. We have 7 million to find yet.

There are at least 70 sextillion stars in the universe. That’s a 7 followed by 22 zeroes.

Last year the United States grew 13 billion bushels of corn.

And here’s the best: Last year, California barreled 600 million gallons of wine.

And California is just a child compared to France and Italy: 1.6 billion gallons each. Four billion gallons from those three places.

What reckless excess. Quit whining.

According to one poet, the Cana couple whose wedding Jesus attended went on to live a happy life together. They worked, they played, they laughed, they made sweet love.

Not everything was perfect. They fought, they sulked, they got sick, like everyone else.

But every day, in every common glass of water, they tasted hints of garnet gold.⁵

⁵ Kathy Coffey, “The Cana Couple Reminisce,” *Theology Today*, 1992, 459.

“This story of the Wedding at Cana is here to remind us that ours is a God of unstinting largesse, sweeping charity, and reckless excess.”

—The Great Prayer—
By The Reverend Dr. Katie Snipes Lancaster

As the snow piles high around us,
We remember with gratitude
Shelter and food
The miracle of substance and survival
And we recommit to ensuring such thriving for all.
And that is why we gather to worship
Gratitude and commitment
Delighting in the presence of God
And seeking God's glory in our daily lives
May we be humbled in the presence of the Lord.
Let us worship God together.

God of this good earth, we are hard pressed, forgetful.
We live as if our own lives are the center of it all, as if
this here is all there is. And yet you presided over the
womb of beginning born from chaos into light. What
was once just a glint, a longing, became your deepest
pursuit. Open us up to the wider song of hope
beyond this day. The snowy fox, the bat, the cicada
deep underground, each a miracle, formed of dust,
made alive, breathed into by your deepest promises.
Your uncompromising gift of life unfolds before us.

Yet somehow in spite of it all, even when we seek you,
even when you open our minds to possibility, there is
a lasting impression that we cannot hold such beauty.
We live fragmented. Pretending. Unburdened and
then regretful. Our disobedience, a forecast of trouble.
We forget the hungry. From the beginning of time, we
your people, buy one more something or other instead
of turning our focus toward justice, mercy, tenderness,
and creative love. You send us prophets in every age,
people who prod us to start over, to accept, even
half awake the pleasure of constant good, of saving
hope, of invisible generosity, of self-chosen kindness.
But our noise canceling headphones block out such
messages and we tumble forward unpersuaded.

But hope is not canceled. In your abundance,
underserved grace bursts forth again. Hope beyond
hope is made known. You send us Jesus Christ who is
light beyond light and love beyond love. Your eternal
song of tender hope is blessed by the certainty of word
made flesh. We can hope because Jesus walked the
road before us. Incarnate you tumbled body into the
deepest injustices, into the hardest places we dare not
enter. You sacrificed. You blessed. You broke bread.
You fed and feed us. Even when there are wars and
rumors of wars, when there is famine, hatred, and
betrayal, you are there, a silent presence, a welcoming
warmth, a permanent nearness with enough
gravitational pull to spin us together toward love.

Accompany us O Christ. Today transform us and
these familiar things—bread and cup—in the same
way you continually transform the world around
us. Bless bread and cup, wheat and grape, farmer
and harvest, seed and sower. So that in sharing
these simple elements, we might taste and see your
goodness, and glimpse what it is to be in communion
with you and with one another.

Through Christ, in Christ, with Christ, in the unity
of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, most
holy God, now and forever.

And hear us as we pray together the prayer Jesus
teaches us. Our Father....Amen.

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