

Turning Water into Wine

John 2: 1-11

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Rev. Dr. Cathryn Turrentine

Two or three years ago, in springtime, Dave and I flew to California to spend some time with Dave's brother Andy and his wife Brenda. It was a lovely visit – a break from the chilly and muddy New Hampshire spring. We had a warm welcome and warm sunshine while we were there.

The centerpiece of our trip was a two-day drive through wine country. I had never done that before. The bright yellow mustard plants were in bloom across every hillside, and row upon row of grape vines were just leafing out. It was beautiful!

Andy and Brenda have a list of their favorite wineries, and they know the types of wines that are each one's specialty. Each winery has a tasting room, and for a small fee, you get to taste just a tiny sip of your choice of several different wines.

I learned a lot on that trip! For example, I learned that if they are left on the vine long enough, the grapes will ferment all by themselves. In a sense, the wineries just speed up the process that takes place naturally.

I loved seeing the raw, earthy elements that go into making wine all laid out before me, acre after acre: the good earth, sunshine, water, and time. God's gifts to all of us.

I think the memory of that drive through wine country provides a good backdrop for our reading of today's scripture, in which Jesus turns water into wine at a wedding in Cana. The first half of the Gospel of John centers around a series of

“signs,” not really miracles but signs that point to Jesus, carrying the power and the glory of God. This is the first of those signs.

Jesus and his mother and his disciples arrive at this weeklong wedding feast. Eventually the wine runs out, which would be a great embarrassment for the bridegroom, who is hosting the feast. Mary comes to Jesus and says, “They have no wine,” apparently expecting Jesus to do something about it. He pushes back. “It’s not my time yet,” he tells her. But she calmly turns to the servants and says, “Do whatever he tells you.” I suppose Jesus never got too old to do what his mother asked him to do.

So, Jesus tells the servants to fill six huge stone jars with water – about 150 gallons of water altogether, a huge amount. Then he says, “Now draw some out and take it to the chief steward,” which they do. The steward comes back saying, “Everyone else serves the best wine first and then, when everyone is drunk, they serve inferior wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.” And suddenly, the disciples – who had already left their regular lives to follow Jesus – believe in him.

There are three things I want us to notice about this scripture passage. The first is that absolutely no one at that party sought out Jesus until the wine ran out. The wine they had wasn’t great, and it wasn’t really enough, but it was something, so they didn’t look for anything better until what they had was gone. Maybe they just couldn’t imagine that there was something better than what they had. Or maybe the inferior wine that they were drinking was good enough as long as it was there. But when it ran out, suddenly there was this great need – a need that Jesus filled with the very best wine, and in great abundance.

I wonder how many of us do that, too. We have the opportunity to turn to Jesus every single day, to seek out the very best life that God has to offer us, to ask for the grace and joy that are surely there if we only seek them. But we don't, because the life we already have keeps us from seeking him. We don't turn to him until we have absolutely run dry. I have done that myself. I have waited until there was nowhere else to turn, and only THEN turned to God. And God supplied my need and more.

But the joyful abundance of God is available to us on ordinary days, too. I wonder what it would take for us to feel that we are worthy of God's great love and care and provision for us, not just when we have run dry, every day.

The second thing I would like us to notice about this scripture is that Jesus provides what they need from what they have. The host is out of wine. Jesus' answer is, "Go get some water," because water is what they have, and he turns that ordinary water into the finest wine. No matter how great our need is, no matter how meagre are our resources, if we bring what we have to God, God can make something miraculous out of it.

The third thing I want us to notice about this passage is that Jesus is demonstrating his power to do what God does. And here I would bring us back to my trip to wine country, where God turns water into wine every year. Water and earth and sunshine come together to turn a tiny grape into wine, even if people don't intervene. God makes wine every year. Jesus has that same power.

At the wedding feast, when the wine runs out, Jesus demonstrates his divinity by turning the ordinary element of water into wine. And he does it in such great abundance that the celebration can go on and on and on.

Jesus has arrived at the time for his adult ministry, and a celebration is in order.

And what a celebration it is! A time to relish the joyful divine presence among us. A time to trust in God's abundance. A time to taste the wine that God offers and know that it is good.

Amen