

FILLED TO THE BRIM
a sermon based on Isaiah 62:1-5

John 2:1-

11

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A wedding back in Jesus' day was a big deal. It wasn't just a ceremony, but an experience shared by the a large part of the community. The typical wedding feast could last up to seven days. Strange as that may seem to our modern day experience, a wedding was often a happy interlude in their otherwise care-worn existence. The ceremony would begin on a Tuesday at midnight and, after the wedding, the father of the bride would take his daughter to every house in the neighborhood so that everyone might congratulate her. It was a community experience. Weddings were an opportunity to fill the glass to the brim!

At the wedding in Cana of Galilee, to which Jesus and his Mother were invited, there was great joy but a problem developed. There was a shortage of wine. Not only was this a social embarrassment but it was also thought to be a bad omen for the marriage, happening as it did at the mid-point of their celebration. At the very least, the omen portended that the couple would have more than their share of challenges in their life together. At the very worst, running out of wine raised the question if the marriage would survive at all. In this instance, the couple in question was blessed to have Jesus as one of their guests.

So Mary approached Jesus and asked him to help. His response? "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?" Sounds pretty harsh, doesn't it? It seems so unlike him and it has long puzzled biblical scholars. Perhaps the context will give us a clue as to what's going on here. Jesus, at this moment, had not officially launched his ministry. He was thirty years old and had just gathered together his disciples. He may have felt uncertain as to

what he should or even could do. Despite the way he spoke to his mother, he must have felt some empathy for the wedding couple. After all, he probably had grown up with them. He would certainly not want their wedding celebration to be marred by running out of wine.

It was a crucial moment for Jesus and his disciples. It was a custom in that time to serve the best wine first and the poorer quality wine at the end of a celebration. So when this better wine was presented to the master of the banquet near the end of the festivities he was most impressed. The earlier wine had been good but **this** - **THIS** was superb. But not everyone knew about the miracle. The miracle was known only to a few: the disciples, the host and the servants who brought the water in, and Mary who had a feeling that her son would be able to do something, though she may not have even guessed he could do what he did. I have a story. Several years ago, when Johnny Carson was still the host of The Tonight Show, he interviewed an eight year old boy. The young man was asked to appear because he had rescued two friends in a coal mine outside his hometown in West Virginia. As Johnny questioned the boy, it became apparent to him and the audience that the young man was a Christian. So Johnny asked him if he attended Sunday school. When the boy said he did, Johnny inquired, "What are you learning about in Sunday school?" "Last week," the boy said, "our lesson was about when Jesus went to a wedding and turned water into wine." The audience roared, but Johnny tried to keep a straight face. Then he said, "And what did you learn from that story?" The boy squirmed in his chair. But then he smiled and said, "If you're going to have a wedding, make sure you invite Jesus!" That little boy was on to something. When you invite Jesus into your life, your cup will be filled to the brim! Our Scripture story has a curious ending: "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him; and they remained there a few days." Why this event at this time and in this place? Why not a more public and impressive setting? Perhaps it was because this quiet, under-stated, gentle miracle set the tone for Jesus' ministry in a way that no other miracle or act could, because it was a humble act of service. Phillip Yancey in his book "The Jesus I Never Knew"

describes it this way: the wine came from huge thirty-gallon jugs that stood full of water at the front of the house, vessels that were used by observant Jews to fulfill the rules on ceremonial washing. Even a wedding feast had to honor the burdensome rituals of cleansing. Jesus, perhaps with a twinkle in his eye, transformed those jugs, ponderous symbols of the old way, into wineskins, harbingers of the new. From purification water came the splendid new wine of a whole new era. The time for ritual cleansing had passed; the time for celebration had begun.

..Prophets like John the Baptist preached judgment. Jesus' first miracle, however, proclaimed God's tender mercy." [Adapted from Phillip Yancey, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan 1995, p. 168.] You see, Jesus believed that the covenant God had made with the people, was more important than the many rituals that many people felt obligated to observe. Isaiah's prophecy was at the core of Jesus' faith: "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." Jesus devoted his life to renewing the covenant between God and the people.

What he wanted more than anything else was for people to know how much God loved them. If they knew that and accepted that love, then they would celebrate the potential of each day as a gift filled to the brim with joy and possibility. In his book, *Deep Joy For A Shallow World*, Richard A. Wing, tells how he learned to appreciate the value of each day. He writes, *When I was a senior in high school, we produced Thornton Wilder's Our Town. At seventeen years of age, I thought that a play that had a stage manager talking to the crowd along with people from the graveyard was pure craziness. The problem was that at seventeen I had not experienced heartburn, let alone the loss of someone I love. So my problem was that I could not hear the play rightly. Now that I have seen friends my own age die, I can hear the words of Emily as she comes back from the grave to relive one day. Emily asks the stage manager, "Do any human beings ever realize life while they live it? Every, every minute?" The stage manager says, "No. The saints and poets, maybe -- they do some." A man from the grave says, "Yes, now you know. Now you know! That's what it was to be alive. To move about in a cloud of ignorance; to go up and down trampling on the feelings of those ... of those about you. To*

spend and waste time as though you had a million years. To be always at the mercy of one self-centered passion or another. Now you know ... that's the happy existence you wanted to go back to, ignorance and blindness. "Then another man speaks from the grave and says, "That ain't the whole truth and you know it."

The whole truth is this: "As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you."

Or have you had one too many disappointments in life to appreciate God's love for you. Is your cup half full or half empty? Do you feel like giving up? Hear these words from his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" penned by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to the local clergy who asked that he tone down his protests.

I wish you had commended the Negro sit-inners and demonstrators of Birmingham for their sublime courage, their willingness to suffer and their amazing discipline in the midst of great provocation. One day the South will recognize its real heroes. They will be the James Merediths, with the noble sense of purpose that enables them to face Jeering, and hostile mobs, and with the agonizing loneliness that characterizes the life of the pioneer. They will be old, oppressed, battered Negro women, symbolized in a seventy-two-year-old woman in Montgomery, Alabama, who rose up with a sense of dignity and with her people decided not to ride segregated buses, and who responded with ungrammatical profundity to one who inquired about her weariness: "My feets is tired, but my soul is at rest." They will be the young high school and college students, the young ministers of the gospel and a host of their elders, courageously and nonviolently sitting in at lunch counters and willingly going to jail for conscience' sake. One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judaeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

If I have said anything in this letter that overstates the truth

and indicates an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I have said anything that understates the truth and indicates my having a patience that allows me to settle for anything less than brotherhood, I beg God to forgive me.

I hope this letter finds you strong in the faith. I also hope that circumstances will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or a civil rights leader but as a fellow clergyman and a Christian brother. Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities, and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.

Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood,

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

This is what Jesus wants us to know. God's rejoices over you — every day. The world would fill our cup with cheap promises but God fills our cup with the wine of true, unconditional love. If God fills our cup, then no one can take it away from us. And we will have the strength and courage to face whatever life brings to us with hope and joy. And let the people say, "Amen."