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 Texts: John 2:1-11  
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### Ode to Joy

Yesterday, I had the pleasure of officiating at a wedding for a couple of grooms from Stamford, CT. They were beautiful in their suit coats and corsages! It was a delight to be presiding at their celebration of marriage and appreciate the beautiful bouquets they left for church today, too.

I couldn't help but marvel all over again at how love in the room somehow lights up everything and everyone in its path.

Each person looks taller and more gorgeous at weddings, don't you think?

The commitments expressed, the challenges acknowledged, the promises to be there in times of plenty and in times of want are truly miraculous and filled me up -with joy. The hopes of dancing the night away later on at the reception helped them, too, I'm sure.

I never got around to the reception, of course, (because I had to go home and finish this sermon) but if the party was anything like my cousin Caitlin's wedding earlier this summer, the open bar flowed without ceasing and the DJ kept them dancing into the wee hours.

In our gospel story for today, we have quite a party going on, too. Everyone in the neighborhood is there including Mary, the mother of Jesus, and his new disciples, who'd joined the fold the day before.

This is very early in Jesus' ministry so not a lot has happened yet in terms of Jesus revealing himself.

John's gospel is the only one which includes this Wedding and Mary is front and center there right next to Jesus. This is the first of only two times we'll see her in this gospel until the end of it when Mary is at the foot of the cross (Jn 19.) Let's not go there today, though, we have a wedding! But when Jesus says, "My hour has not yet come", it should sound familiar. Throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus will refer to his "hour" which signals the time of his death.

Later, the hour "will come" and Jesus will tell his disciples he won't see them for a while. There's new life and death side by side always.

John's gospel, like that first-rate wine that flowed at the wedding, is one of a kind. Unlike the other 3 gospels, (Matthew, Mark and Luke) where Jesus heals the sick, preaches and teaches in a more "prophet-rabbi" kind of way, in John's gospel, we're also given poetry, signs and wonders ( 7 of them!).

And now wine, really good wine at that. (Another unique characteristic of John's gospel is filled with the 7 signs and wonders that Jesus often pronounces as the "I am's"; I am the Bread of Life, I am the Light, I am the Vine (or is it I am the wine?).

On this 3rd day of his ministry, Jesus kicks off his public ministry by turning water into more than 100 gallons of the best wine because his mother told him to. And only a few folks in the room even know what's going on...

I have to laugh at that exchange between Mary and her son. It seems nobody's paying attention to them. Jesus just wants to have a good time off the clock and his mother ropes him in perhaps? It's not often that we see this very human and, dare I say, rude side of Jesus. This wasn't the night for the great reveal...but pay no mind, Mary knows him better than anyone else and

tells one of the servants to “do what he tells you.” (v.5) A mother’s eyes- and heart- see everything.

Mary rarely gets the spotlight –most women don’t in the scriptures-yet, her role is quite significant. Imagine if she’d said nothing! And those big empty jars used for ritual cleansing in the corner would’ve remained empty; folks had probably been washing their hands at the week-long festivities for quite some time, no wonder they were empty.

What’s interesting to me when I pay attention to the text is that there’s no life crisis or death here that Jesus needs to attend to. What is the gospel writer, be pointing us to? Writes theologian and preacher Barbara Brown Taylor, “This was not the feeding of the five thousand. It wasn’t even the healing of the 10 lepers. It was the restocking of the bar. It was the refueling of revelers who’d probably had enough.”<sup>1</sup>

Who is the spotlight on here? And what might we learn about who the person of Jesus is and the place of the miraculous in our own lives, the place where God’s light can shine when we least expect it. And often does.

Clearly, this wedding celebration is a time of joy for the entire community. Back in the 1st c, the whole village would have come to partake and celebrate for days. That is true in many cultures today, too, from Haiti to India. None of this limiting the guest list to 75 people so that your new date can’t come.

There are many theories of course and various scholars and preachers who have analyzed this first sign of Jesus’ at Cana. Among them, that Jesus is the true Bridegroom here and we’re given a foretaste of the Last supper.

We might also see a preview of communion around the table where Jesus becomes the bread of life, blessing the elemental, ordinary staples of our days from bread to wine, to people, and probably any animals that may have wandered in.

Another, that this, too, is the Kingdom of God where all are invited to participate in the feast.

There’s abundance and generosity for everyone and, of course, the best vintage is saved for last. And no one has to be embarrassed about running out of anything!

I’m quite taken with that theme running through Jesus’ ministry. That’s the great miracle isn’t it? That there’s not only wine enough but that there’s more than enough of everything. More than enough possibilities for healing, and generosity and justice. In the kinship of God’s expansive Love, plenty replaces emptiness, separation transforms into inclusion, and exiles find a way home.

If we zoom out further, we can imagine that the miracle here is not about the wedding but the promises of the Spirit in our midst moving through our lives; and the communion that grows exponentially with the connections that flourish among us as a community.

Whether in our friendships, families, or among neighbors, and in all the places where we honor the ties that bind us to one another and the struggles and joys that come with them; through it all, the presence of wonder lives, and the miraculous lies in wait for us to notice.

I enjoyed speaking yesterday with my neighbor, Hayat Popal. As you know, the Popals (two parents and 5 children) came from Afghanistan about a year ago and live in our church’s refugee house in the Rogers Lake neighborhood. I’d just seen the pictures of Hayat and his family at a pool party hosted last Sunday by refugee committee members. I saw a photo of Sola, the youngest at 1 year old, floating in the middle of the pool in a yellow rubber duck and her mom, Bibi, diving right in!

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *Always a Guest*. (2020).

Wrote Juliette, the host of the party, “Laughter and smiles were everywhere. Afterwards, we hung out, had some nibbles and Hayat said how lucky he felt that he had landed in this community with such nice and generous people and with good schools for his children. Other friends of his who escaped from Afghanistan have not all had such a welcoming experience. Bravo to all on the committee who have made this small contribution to this one family.”

Bravo, too, to many of you in our church and all of the 3 churches in town who've helped support this family and so many other refugees trying to make a home here. With all the Popal family has endured in the past, to witness their joy as they continue to put down meaningful roots...well, it is the stuff of miracles.

As the poet, David Whyte, wrote in his collection of essays called *Consolations*:

“Joy is the act of giving ourselves away before we need to or be asked to. Joy is practiced generosity.”

Joy is practiced generosity. That sounds just about right.

As you ponder your own life, are you able to see signs and wonders of grace that sustain or surprise you? What comforts you when the signs are hard to see? Or, is there an abundance you're grateful for?

Whether you're dancing at a wedding, hosting a pool party, saying farewell to your college student heading back to school, or driving to a PowWow up the road sometime soon, may you notice the miraculous quietly lighting up the shadows. May the wonder of our shared life with a God-with-us, move through any weary bones and offer you some of the best libations on tap. Let the party begin!

Let the party begin!