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Isaiah 62: 1 – 5
1 Corinthians 12: 1 – 11

Psalms 36: 5 – 10
John 2: 1 – 11

Six silent, stone jars. Mute, monolithic witnesses to the miracle within. Jars nearly as large as you or I, filled to the brim with water that has become the most incredible wine. Wine with a 'joyful body, hints of amazement and a finish of enduring fulfillment' as one writer has put it. [Matthew L. Skinner, Connections Year C, Vol. 1] Wine in extravagant abundance, provided through extravagant grace. Wine, poured out in celebration of life, poured out by the Lord of Life.

Six stone jars. Not just earthenware, but vessels hewn from rock. Each filled with as much as 30 gallons of wine. Enough to keep the small village of Cana celebrating for a very long time. The equivalent of 600 to 900 bottles of the finest wine. Enough to give the wine aisles at Two Guys a run for their money. Enough to point to the outlandish and outright audacious nature of God's miraculous grace.

So, what are we to make of it all? We post-enlightenment, 21st century people are given to basing life on what can be believed via measuring and testing. We are not so much given to basing life on intangibles, especially not ones that are mysterious or miraculous. Instead, our minds become occupied with questions: 1) whose wedding is it? 2) why are Mary, Jesus and the disciples invited? 3) How does Mary know that Jesus can - and will - do something about this social faux pas on the part of the hosts? 4) What does Mary *expect* Jesus to do? 5) How do the servants manage to fill such large jars with so much water so quickly, and why do they have to? If Jesus can turn water into wine, surely Jesus could save the servants the trouble and just go ahead and create wine *ex nihilo*, out of nothing!

We post-enlightenment, 21st century people generally avoid dealing with miracles because they are beyond our everyday experience. Miracles are out of our comfort zone of what we believe is physically possible in our everyday world. But that is exactly what miracles are, aren't they? They are events that shatter our illusions of conventional explanations and expectations. Miracles confuse probabilities with possibilities. Miracles - if we let them - can turn our comfort zones into discovery zones.

The extraordinary extravagance of this miracle, just like the feeding of the 5,000, is at the very heart of what Jesus wants us to see in his actions and what Jesus wants us to know about the God whom he reveals. Jesus wants us to know that the gifts we receive from God in overflowing abundance come in all shapes and sizes, all vessels and vintages. Not every act of God has to turn the world on its head or have cosmic, earth-shattering implications. Sometimes, God is simply sowing felicity and joy. Jesus isn't so much about forcing a bunch of cognitive instructions down his disciples' throats - including ours! Rather, he wants us to experience God, to enjoy God, and to know that God, in turn, wants to experience and enjoy us. And by providing wine for a wedding, Jesus tacitly sanctions things that make our human lives meaningful and pleasant: relationships, intimacy, community, hospitality, family and friends, celebration.

Barbara Brown Taylor writes that it isn't that facts in scriptural stories don't matter, it's just that they don't matter as much as the stories themselves and what they say about God. In other words, sometimes we need to override the fact-checker and just hear the stories. Then, like children listening to a bedtime story, we need to crawl inside one of the characters and allow ourselves to become real

within the story – find our role, our perspective, our voice. “You let the story come to life within you,” Taylor writes, “and *then* you decide on the basis of your own tears or laughter whether or not it is true.” Fact does matter, but truth matters more. What truths are revealed to us in this story of Jesus celebrating with family and friends? What truths are revealed to us in the abundant provision, the compassionate grace?

One of the questions I posed a few minutes ago was ‘why do the servants have to be involved in the miracle at all?’ To paraphrase Jesus, what does it have to do with the servants? Or, what does it have to do with any of us? Because *we* are the servants. That’s where we can enter the story. By bringing something of ourselves to God and making ourselves servants available for God’s overflowing, extravagant grace.

It may not be that God, the Creator of the Cosmos, *needs* us to participate in turning water into wine, the ordinary into the extraordinary. But it may just be that God, the Creator of Humanity and Lover of the People of God, *wants* us to participate. God desires to work through us as well as in us, and asks us to bring forward our gifts to be transformed. Like these servants, we make God’s glory present when we offer our gifts for service, for ministry. As witnesses to the true source of this fine wine, we become epiphanies – manifestations of God’s glory, grace and abundance, alive and at work in this world.

But surely God can do better in transforming the world than to rely on humanity in all of our limitations and imperfections! Are we really that central to God’s involvement in and redemption of the world? Are we really that necessary or effective as mirrors of God’s glory? The answer is yes. God has become what we are so that we can become what God is. Incarnational in our love. Incarnational in our reflection of God’s glory. Incarnational in God being present not just in *the* flesh and blood, but *our* very particular flesh and blood.

It is not coincidental that the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry takes place at a wedding. Weddings are celebrations of possibilities, of new life and new identity. A wedding is a metaphor for life itself: the joy and the journey, the commitment and the companionship, the rhythms and the rituals. All of which form who we are. There are wedding times of laughter, dancing and toasting. There are wedding times of serving, waiting and providing. And there are wedding times when the music winds down, and the wine, the feasting, the joy, the energy and the hope run out. That is when we most need to bring our murky, impure vessels of mere water to God to be transformed into wine to be sipped, savored and appreciated. God helps us face the inadequacy of our offerings and to look deeper into their depths to discover – surprise! – the bouquet of new wine.

Herbert O’Driscoll writes that the more our lives proceed, the more frequently we experience the miracle of the water of life being turned into new wine. And that the more this happens, the more we realize something about that new wine. We begin to realize that it is not the sparkling, light, bubbly wine of our early experience, but rather a more nuanced, full-bodied wine, mixed with our blood, sweat and tears. Each new wine is richer, stronger and more powerful to our lips. We learn to savor that depth of grace. We learn that we are drinking the cup of wine of a God, the Lord of Hosts, who saves the best wine for last.

“You give them drink from the river of your delights,” the Psalmist praises God. Jesus comes and provides a superior wine, not because he is trying to make a really great impression on the hosts or

the guests, but because Jesus wants everyone to hunger for more and to not be satisfied with inferior substitutes.

Six, large stone jars. Each about the size of any one of us. Receptive to their new life as vessels of fine wine. Filled to the brim and overflowing with God's glory. How much like these jars are we? How receptive are we to the gifts, the miracles, which lie within us? How consecrated, how set aside for holiness are our lives? And the servants. About the size and likeness of any of us. Receptive to God's direction. Filled with the knowledge of the source of the water of life. How much like these servants are we? How willing are we to put ourselves in the service of God? How ready are we to ladle out that glorious new wine to all who come to the party?

Let us pray. Glorious, gracious, generous God, we come to your table, and you consecrate us as vessels of your bread and your wine, your body and your blood. Open our eyes to the waters that well up within us that are the signs and materials of your grace. Open our lips to the sweetness and richness of the miracles that are within us and all around us. Open our hearts to your service, that we might offer to others the overflowing cup of your abundant love. We ask this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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