

Sermon for January 20, 2019 “Knowing God: Spirit”

John 2:1-11

Have you ever been at a party when the wine ran out? Well, I don't go to the kinds of parties where they serve wine. Preachers just don't get invited to that kind of party. But I would have to answer that question “yes, yes I have been to a party when the wine ran out.” I have been at a number of parties when the wine ran out. I say that because in this story of Jesus at the wedding there is more going on than just the beverage supply running dry.

This event happened at the very beginnings of Jesus' ministry. Jesus was already attracting disciples, but he had not worked any wonders and was not widely known. Jesus and his Mother along with Jesus' disciples were invited to a wedding feast. These feasts would go on for days. It was a way of celebrating the promise of new life and to thank God.

So it was potentially devastating when the wine ran out. It could mean the end of the party and would cast a pall over the marriage. Mary realized what was happening, so she turned to Jesus and simply said “The wine ran out.” Jesus responded, “So what, the time isn't ripe for me to start doing that kind of thing.” But Mary knew he would do something so she told the servant to do whatever Jesus said.

So, what did Jesus do when the wine ran out? He told the servant to fill up the water barrels. I mean water if free. You just have to draw it. Yet these were no ordinary water barrels. They were ones that were there for the people feasting to wash their hands and utensils. The cleanliness codes of the Pharisees were rather strict. So ceremonial water was there in abundance so that people could wash and be ceremonially clean. Just check the footnotes in your Bibles; these water jars were 20 to 30 gallons each, and there were six of them!

Then Jesus took this wash water and turned it into wine. He told the servant to draw some water and take it to the Caterer. Imagine the servant's surprise to see that the water was now wine! So he took it to the Steward in charge of the feast.

The steward was surprised. Not because it had been wash water a few minutes ago – he didn't know that. He was surprised because the wine was better than what was served before! So Jesus didn't just make enough wine to keep the party going for a long time, He made wine that was much better than what came before.

And John says that his disciple believed in him. They must have already believed in him, but this event strengthened their belief. God's presence in Jesus and through his life was made known to them.

Remember, I said there was more going on here than just Jesus making something to drink. That something more is in the detail of the water jars. These were no ordinary water jars. John goes to the trouble of telling us that they were for the rites of purification. These jars and that party represented the spiritual state of the people of God.

The wine represented the religion or Spirit of the religion of God's people. Spiritually speaking the people of God were running on empty. Just as the party had run out of spirits to drink, the people of God had run out of the Holy Spirit. So Jesus took a relic of their tired out religion and made something new from it. When the Spirit had run out Jesus came to fill them up not with just water but with the best wine – wine from God - the Holy Spirit!

Yes, I have been at a party when the wine ran out. I have been at points in my life when I was running on empty spiritually. I have hit low points when the party was over and life had lost its flavor. So I ask you “Have you ever been at a party when the wine ran out?” Have you ever felt like you were running on empty? If we are honest with ourselves, we all have to admit that we have had low point in our lives. So what should we do when the wine runs out?

I think we can learn the answer to this question from this passage. What do the people in the story do when the wine runs out? First of all Mary turns to Jesus. She could have given up and said “let’s go home this party is over.” She could have run to the market to buy more. But she turned to Jesus.

When we feel the wine running out in our lives, we should turn to Jesus. But often that is not our first response. Often people decide that if they feel empty they should have a pity party. Or they get bitter and selfish – trying to save the few drops of wine left for themselves. Often times they turn away from God and blame God for the tragedies of their lives.

But if we will turn to Jesus, he will fill our lives with his Spirit. He came into this world to fill the empty rituals of God’s people with something better. Jesus himself said, “I came that you may have life and have it abundantly.”(John 10:10) So turn to him. Just say, as Mary did, “Jesus, the wine is running out” and then watch to see a miracle.

What should we do when the wine runs out? What did the servants do? Mary said to them, “Do whatever he tells you.” And that is what they did. Jesus commands must have puzzled them. What does filling up the water barrels have to do with the wine!? And what is the idea of giving wash water to the Chief Steward to drink?

But they did as they were told. Too often when the wine runs out in people’s lives they do the opposite. Instead of following God’s directions, they decide to make their own rules. If they feel empty they try to fill themselves with other things. And in the end they are just as empty.

If we do what Jesus says, love God and love your neighbor, he will give us abundant life. “Seek and ye shall find.” “As you do unto the least of these...”

What should we do when the wine runs out? Do what the disciples did. At the end of the story John says that his disciples believed in him. They didn’t have to. They could have doubted.

I mean really. Water doesn’t just turn into wine! That’s not logical; it’s not realistic. Those kinds of thing just don’t happen now days. I mean who believes in miracles?

Who believes in miracles – I do! I have seen lives changed. I have seen people transformed. I have experienced new life – the emptiness of my soul filled with God’s holy presence. I believe in miracles!

We all have been in a place in our lives when it seemed the party was over. We have all experienced emptiness. When that happens to you do what Mary did: turn to Jesus. When you feel like an empty bottle of wine do what the servants did: do what Jesus tell you to. When life has lost its flavor, do what the disciples did: believe in Jesus.

Jesus came to fill the empty relics of our old lives with abundant eternal life. Just as Jesus filled those jars that were there for empty rituals. So Jesus will fill our lives to the brim. That is why Jesus came to this Earth!

If you have never given your life to Christ then do it today. Let him fill the emptiness of your life with good things. If you have given your lives to him then continue to obey his commands and believe in him. Who knows, you may even witness a few miracles along the way!