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2 Epiphany C: John 2:1-11
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The Glory of Getting Involved

We hear this morning from John's Gospel about the first sign of Jesus' glory: Jesus turns water into wine at a marriage feast. Luke has Jesus appear in a synagogue to start proclaiming his ministry, but John -- John has Jesus at a party. And Jesus' first sign is making gallons and gallons -- about 180 gallons -- of wine, choice wine, the finest vintage, to be shared at a village wedding celebration. Our Lord and Savior first reveals his glory by making a party last longer. "Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee," writes John.

John calls it a sign, not a miracle. It was miraculous, but John wants us to know the event points to something, shows us something.

In part, the sign shows something about time. This is a story brimming over with references to time.

Many ancient writers, including rabbis and the Jewish theologian Philo of Alexandria, used the image of the water of the present age compared with the wine of the age to come. What lies ahead, the promised future, will be richer, fuller -- like the difference between water and wine. Also, Old Testament prophets like Amos pictured the salvation of Israel, the fulfillment of all God's plans and promises, like this: "The time is surely coming, says the Lord, when . . . the mountains will drip sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will restore the fortunes of my people Israel, and they shall rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink their wine" (Amos 9:13-14). So what the disciples get a glimpse of -- the sign -- shows them a new time has begun, a new age, and Jesus ushers it in. It shows them with Jesus, there is a new way to be in the world. It shows that in Jesus, we have a living picture of our extravagant God, who will make mountains drip sweet wine, who makes more than enough wine for a wedding, who makes more than enough for all.

We are also told that the wedding takes place on the third day. It's on the third day that Jesus changes water into wine. Our gospel writer just loves double meanings. If you hear an echo in the phrase, "on the third day," it's because John wants you to think about another third day, a third day, when just at daybreak, Jesus changed despair into rejoicing, the finality of death into new and eternal life – his resurrection.

On this third day, there is a wedding in Cana of Galilee – an occasion to celebrate, a party. So Jesus, his mother, and his followers, go to the party. But soon, the celebration is threatened when the wine gives out. Mary says to Jesus, "They have no wine."

What's the big deal? It's embarrassing. If a groom can't provide enough for the wedding feast, it doesn't bode well for the marriage, and a wedding feast in their day is supposed to go on for a week. But already they have run out of wine.

Think of it. In Jesus' time, people's everyday existence was caught up in the present. Every day you had to go to the well to get enough water for the day. You had to get enough food for the day. You had to get enough oil for the lamps to last through the night. But a wedding celebration is a break from the everyday, a break from the daily pattern of having just enough. It's a celebration of a future abundant with blessings.

But the wine runs out.

Mary brings this to Jesus' attention, and Jesus gives a startling reply: "What concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."

Pardon me?

In the language of John's Gospel, Jesus' hour means most of all the hour of the cross, the time of his death. But here in the immediate context of Mary's words to Jesus, it sounds really strange. Someone is in trouble. The host at a wedding celebration, someone they must know in this little village, is about to be humiliated, and Jesus' initial response is, "not now – it's not our problem. What business is that of ours?"

Perhaps we don't know whether to be surprised that Jesus said it, or more surprised to hear Jesus say something we have all said. We have all felt that way at one time or another: What concern is that of mine? Not now. Now is not the time.

Mary doesn't take it for Jesus' last word, because she says to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." And the next thing we know, Jesus is turning water into wine.

What made him do it? What made him get involved? We don't know. It doesn't seem to matter. We just need to know that Jesus chooses to get involved. Jesus chooses to do something to help, and John calls this the first great sign that revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

Think about how different the story would be if Jesus had just stuck with, it's not my problem; it's none of my business; it's not my time. What if there had been no water into wine? And what if the next day when the leper is by the side of the road, Jesus had said, "It's not my concern, and it's not my time." And what if, every time he met someone in need, he had said, "What is that to me?"

It's unimaginable, isn't it? Because what Jesus is about over and over again is reaching out, making the concerns of others his concerns, his teaching his followers that we are all connected, like the parts of a body are connected, and what is the concern or need of one is the concern of all. Jesus' teaching and acting out this compassionate care for all led to his hour, his crucifixion and glorification on the cross.

The water into wine is the first of Jesus' signs and reveals his glory. We know, don't we, that it is a sign, it does bear witness to God, when someone moves past the view that it is not my problem and not my time and gets involved. It makes a huge difference to our lives that Jesus turned water into wine, and that Jesus continued to show his glory in unexpected ways, even by dying on the cross.

Here is another story, a story for this holiday weekend. In the mid-1950's, Martin Luther King, Jr. finished his coursework for his Ph.D. and took his first job, as pastor of a church in Montgomery, Alabama. He was a father with a family. He had just begun his first pastorate. But not long after he went to Alabama, Rosa Parks refused to go to the back of a bus. A

meeting was held by the African American community in Montgomery and they chose Martin Luther King, Jr. to lead the bus boycott. He had a lot of good reasons to say, That can't be my concern right now. I have a young family. I am just getting to know my congregation. It is not my business. It is not my time.

But Martin Luther King, Jr. said yes. He answered God's call telling him now was the time to speak. This was his concern. Now was the time to point to God's dream of justice rolling down like waters, of all people gathering on God's holy mountain.

There is still much to be done. There are still so many places – every week brings more -- and people who need to see signs of God's glory, to experience justice, compassion, and hope.

The first of Jesus' signs was to choose to get involved. He changed water into wine. And in that choice, he signaled that a new day had come, a new age had begun, Jesus' glory was revealed.

What about you? Is it your time?

Some of the insights in this sermon came from sermons I read many years ago by Carl Schenck and John VanOrsdall.