

“Even Jesus needs a push now and then”
Westminster Presbyterian Church
January 16, 2022

Isaiah 62:1-5 and John 2:1-12

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Once long ago, there were two people who loved each other—or at least had been told to by their parents. They weren't famous. They weren't rich. There wasn't anything special, really, about their story, except for a certain guest. They had just been married, and as was the custom at the time, they were enjoying a big wedding feast. Unlike our wedding receptions which tend to last only a few hours, these parties in 1st century Palestine lasted seven days. If you think people get crazy at receptions today, imagine what seven days of drinking, eating, and dancing might do.

The first thing John tells us is that Jesus' mom is there. He tells us this before he even tells us that Jesus is there. Was he embarrassed, the savior of the world's mommy there at the party with him, like some junior high dance where your mother is the chaperone but is dancing wildly in the spotlight? Jesus is over there, hugging the wall, just praying no one notices him. He hasn't started his ministry yet: no miracles, no teachings. Just him and his friends, hanging out.

They're in Cana, a Podunk little town about 10 miles north of Nazareth.

It's the third day, a phrase John only uses one other time in the whole Gospel, when, on the third day, Jesus rises from the dead—which also, incidentally, is the only other time in the Gospel of John when the mother of Jesus appears, there at the foot of the cross, when Jesus is crucified.

Something important is going on here, something connected with Jesus' purpose, his death and resurrection. But no one knows that yet, not even Jesus. Well, no one except his mom.

It's on this third day that the wine runs out. Maybe more people came than anticipated, or they're an especially thirsty lot, or maybe the groom's family has been struggling financially and just couldn't afford more. They've had a hard year, and have been doing their best to cover it up, but now everybody's about to know.

Imagine it. You've spent countless hours planning every detail, and then it falls apart. The hairdresser doesn't show; the tuxes don't get picked up; the maid of honor is sick; the pastor is late; the caterer bails; there's no heat at the church; there's a pandemic and weddings are canceled.

Alyce McKenzie writes, “Weddings epitomize the fact that even the best planned and most auspicious of human scenarios are imperfect, flawed, and lacking. Something always goes wrong. Something is always askew. In the miracle at the wedding at Cana, human resources are at an end. There is no more wine left.”

There is not enough. How often have we said those words? Not enough money to pay the bills, not enough food to eat, not enough peace, not enough hope, not enough love, not enough time. The world, like this wedding, is full of “not enough.” Something important always runs out, and no matter how well we planned, no matter how hard we tried, we can’t fix it.

That’s all Jesus’ mom tells him: “They have no wine.” I imagine Jesus’ mom lightly elbowing him in the ribs and giving him a wink: *Come on, son, this is your chance, help them out. You can do it.*

Of course, the question is: Why does Jesus need his mom to encourage him in the first place? Why doesn’t *he* have the idea to help? Well, maybe, even Jesus needs a push now and then.

Jesus’ response may be his most teenager moment yet: “Woman [oh I don’t care if you’re the Son of God, someone’s about to get slapped]... Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not come.” This is what I hear: *Not now, Mom. I’m over here trying to be the Messiah, and you’re embarrassing me. You... ruin everything!*” God help us.

His response seems callous. Why is Jesus reluctant to help? We’ve probably asked ourselves that question many times. When life is falling apart, why doesn’t God intervene?

The key to understanding Jesus’ response is that last bit: “My hour has not come.” This is a phrase Jesus uses repeatedly in the Gospel of John; his “hour” refers to the time when the truth of Jesus’ identity—his glory, his divinity, his salvation—is revealed to the world, most importantly in his death and resurrection.

He tells the Samaritan woman that “the hour is coming... when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (4:21-23). He says, “The hour is coming... when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (5:25-28). And when he is about to be arrested and killed, Jesus looks up to heaven and says, “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you... to give eternal life to all whom you have given to him” (17:1).

Jesus has big ideas about his hour, and it isn’t wine at a wedding. He has a plan, and this isn’t it.

He tells his mother that he’s not ready. Maybe he’s nervous. Maybe he’s been imagining something more glorious. He might just be upset that it was his mom’s idea, and not his.

In typical mom fashion, Mary ignores what he says, arches her eyebrow, and turns to the servants, saying, “Do whatever he tells you.” With that wink again. That tone. She’s saying, *Oh, you will do this, Jesus, or you can find your own way home. I’m going to start sharing baby stories around here.* Jesus knows that voice. And because even Jesus needs a push now and then, Jesus says, *Fine, Mom, I’ll do it.*

Maybe he’s just scared of his mom. Or perhaps Mary has reminded him that all those big things he’s called to—love, justice, truth, resurrection—they’re often, most importantly, expressed in the little things, in the meal you leave at someone’s door, in the hand-written card found in your

mailbox, in the person who gets to church early on Sunday to turn on the lights and shovel the snow, in the simple smile you give someone on a bad day. Maybe she's reminding him of why he's really here—not for glory, but for regular people like these folks who could use a little joy today.

Maybe she's also reminding him that life doesn't always according to plan. Sometimes, you've got to improvise.

And so, with a sigh and shrug, our Jesus turns to the servants and says, "Fill the jars with water."

Mary pushed, and maybe here's the real miracle: Jesus—God—listens. Might that mean that we, like Mary, can influence God's work here on earth? Carol Lakey Hess says that there are some who "dare to argue that God continues to need the heirs of Jesus' mother to go on prodding divine generosity." We need to push God, question and challenge God, constantly bring before God the hurts and injustices of God's people, reminding God: they have no wine. The psalms and Jesus' parables are full of people doing just this, knocking on God's door until their hands are bloody and God has to pay attention. Because, maybe, even God needs a push now and then.

The servants fill the jars and bring them to the steward of the house. He tastes the wine and is amazed: it is the best wine he has ever tasted. But, of course, even as he appreciates the quality of the wine, he doesn't truly understand. He doesn't know that Jesus is the source of the wine.

The servants do, though. They may be poor. They may be slaves. For three days, they have labored on the margins of the wedding, no one ever really seeing them or caring. No one ever offers them a drink or food to eat. And they are the ones—the only ones—who witness the miracle of water turning to wine. They even help the miracle happen. The Greek word used here to name them tells us a lot: *διακονος*. That's right: they were deacons.

The story ends with Jesus walking off with his mother. I imagine her kissing him on the cheek, and whispering in his ear, *I knew you could do it*.

And that, folks, is how Jesus saved a wedding, performing his very first miracle and launching his ministry. Not a healing, not a grand sermon, not walking on water or resurrecting the dead, but by providing a few more days of laughter and celebration and wine. A little act of kindness, urged by his mom.

We may be skeptical as to how Jesus turned water into wine. But John doesn't really care about all that. John only mentions the miracle in passing; he doesn't even use the word *miracle*. He calls it a "sign," a symbol of who Jesus is.

Jesus is the one who shows us the kind of God who revels in weddings, who invites us to let go of our serious plans and all thought of glory and replace them with improvised acts of play and compassion and joy. This is a God who envisions abundance for us. Wherever rise the words "not enough," God seeks to fill our jars with an unexpected gift. God will be there to do this at the end, when Jesus' hour has come, and he hangs on a cross, and all human endeavor has reached its limit. There is no fixing this—this death, the final enemy. The end. Oh God will be

there, just as God was there at this wedding, and God will make that water flow as wine. God will turn death into life, the end into a beginning.

And if God *doesn't* seem to be there, if God doesn't seem to be doing anything about the hurt and injustice we experience, then we will issue our protest: "There is no wine." We will lend our hands to the miracle we so desire, becoming like those servants of old, those deacons, who carried the jars, and like the mother who would not take "no" for an answer. Because, even Jesus needs a push now and then.

So, my friends, push. Push till the jars overflow. **Amen.**