

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Second Sunday after Epiphany – January 17, 2016

Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

John 2:1-11

REFLECTION

**"Don't look for big things, just do small things with great love....
The smaller the thing, the greater must be our love."**

- Mother Teresa (1910-1997)
Albanian Nun, Founder of the Order of the Missionaries of Charity,
a Roman Catholic congregation of women dedicated to helping the poor.

"Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into friend."

- Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968)
American Civil Rights Activist, Baptist Minister

Wedding Crashers

"Reflection on John 2"

by Maren Tirabassi, Gifts in Open Hands

Of course, marriage is a miracle.
like every tender, trusting, tricky
relationship between people

It's a miracle, given the stress
from wedding planner to dementia,
that we ever hold on
to love or respect
or the ability to cope
with each other's relatives.

The truth in John's pragmatic descent
from philosophical heights
to pre-toast nightmare,
is that in every relationship,
we run out of something –

patience or courage or energy,
health or money or parenting skills,
physical attractiveness
or the ability to appreciate humor,

financial trustworthiness
or the willingness to make breakfast in bed,
watch boring television,
drive aunt Susan to the tenth doctor,
accompany the kid to traffic court ...
or just joy.

Everybody runs out of something, sometime.
And then we recognize
Word-boy is in the miracle business.
Jesus can transform things. –
water into wine,
wine into poured-out love,
our days of fear, loss, failure, anxiety,
into a morning more healthy, more whole.

So the first miracle
is not walking on water
but making it a party,
and here comes the pun ...
it works because we party-cipate.

That couple owned the clay jars;
those attendants poured;
the steward did the taste-test
which was probably not so much
swirl and sniff
as supermarket sample.

No hocus-pocus-vintage in the smokus –
Jesus transformed something
that was already there –
something that hadn't run out --
like love or respect or caring,
memories of counting new baby toes
or holding one another's hands
side by side at a grave --
into enough, into abundance.

Of course, they did run out of water

for getting clean –
and had to settle for welcoming
all those dirty guests,

but that's where we come in –
for we're the wedding crashers here.

“Everybody runs out of something, sometime.
Jesus transformed something that was already there – into enough, into abundance.”

The story itself is Dionysian – elements of a story from 1500 years earlier. The Greek God Zeus has a son with a human woman.

...unlike the other Olympians—who often seemed cold, forbidding, and distant—
Dionysus lived many years in the company of mortals and concentrated his
attention on the earthly sphere.

The other gods required the construction of temples, the enactment of sacrifices,
and other rites that emphasized the vast separation between gods and mortals.
Dionysus and his followers, on the other hand, taught that through a combination
of wine, revelry, and religious ecstasy, mortals could achieve a mystical oneness
with him. They could not only be like Dionysus, but in a certain sense, they could
become Dionysus.

Stories tell of Dionysus turning water into a flowing wine-spring. And then there is this
story:

The place where they hold the festival they name the Thyia is about eight stades
from the city. Three pots are brought into the building by the priests and set down
empty in the presence of the citizens and of any strangers who may chance to be
in the country. The doors of the building are sealed by the priests themselves
and by any others who may be so inclined. On the morrow they are allowed to
examine the seals, and on going into the building they find the pots filled with
wine...

Pausanias, Description of Greece, Book 6 Elis 2, 26.1-2 (.),—which you can find in: Meyer, Marvin W.
The Ancient Mysteries; A Sourcebook of Sacred Texts (1987), pg. 95
http://pocm.info/pagan_ideas_miracles.html#wine

So the story...the story is from Greek Mythology passed on for more than a thousand
years. Dionysus is a popular, twice-born God-Man – sometimes called “liberator” –
who knows how to party and bring joy to life which, as we all know, can be harsh. And
Dionysus was accessible – not aloof – so present humans could “become” him.

As with most of our stories ABOUT Jesus – Jesus is very much like all the Gods and Prophets and Liberators and Heroes of old – only BETTER. Such is the nature of such stories. But the point isn't to prove the miracle or debunk it as a re-told myth. The point is to find the truth in the story. And that's where Maren's poem comes in – pointing to the point:

Word-boy is in the miracle business.
Jesus can transform things. –
 water into wine,
 wine into poured-out love,
our days of fear, loss, failure, anxiety,
into a morning more healthy, more whole...

Everybody runs out of something, sometime...
Jesus transformed something that was already there...
– into enough, into abundance.

You may remember stories Jesus told about invited wedding guests not showing up – so bystanders and street-people were brought in for the feast in their stead. You could call them wedding-crashers – or see them as the uninvited but ultimately intended recipients of abundance – the ones who needed it more.

And as Christians – the representatives or embodiments of Christ on Earth – we continue the tradition. We find what is there and transform it into enough – into abundance – for those most in need.

Our social justice heroes have all done that – Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr. They brought in the street-people and offered them what was already available – taking away the barricades and opening the store-houses of abundance.

In 2001, Kathy Baldock, a straight conservative evangelical Christian, met Netto Montoya, a lesbian Native American, on a local hiking trail near her home in the Sierra Nevada. Their developing friendship challenged Baldock's cultural and religious beliefs about gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. And in 2014, the year before Marriage Equality was made the law of the land by the Supreme Court, she wrote a book entitled Walking the Bridgeless Canyon: Repairing the Breach Between the Church and the LGBT Community

And she makes this comparison with another American Civil Rights landmark decision:

In 1967, only 4% of Americans approved of interracial marriage, yet the Supreme Court dismissed the desire of 96% of Americans who did not support it in order to preserve the rights of the minority.

— Kathy Baldock, Walking the Bridgeless Canyon: Repairing the Breach Between the Church and the LGBT Community
<http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/42926496-walking-the-bridgeless-canyon-repairing-the-breach-between-the-church-a>

Protecting the rights of the minority – is transforming what is already there – into abundance. If we are the invited wedding guests – we have the opportunity to align ourselves with the uninvited – to join them in crashing the wedding and claiming what should be available to all. Although our current Supreme Court waited until there was a shift in majority public opinion before declaring Marriage Equality – they finally did the right thing. They transformed something already there into abundance. Dionysus – and Jesus – would be ecstatic – and raise a glass in their honor.

[Bottle of wine held high.]

Baruch attah Adonai - Eluhenu melech ha' olam - bore pri haggafen.
Blessed are You, O Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe,
who created the fruit of the vine.

To Love!

To Abundance!

To Life! L Chaim!

[Take a swig and pass the bottle.]

Scripture Reading for Sunday January 17, 2016 – Epiphany 2 – Year C

John 2:1-11

1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 9 When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10 and said to him,

"Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now."

11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

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