

Sermon for Sunday, January 20, 2019

“Joy Is Gift, Joy Is Resistance”

Second Sunday after Epiphany
January 20, 2019
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Decorah, Iowa
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson

[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Beloved of God, grace to you and peace in the name of Jesus.

Mary is troubled that the wine is gone and goes to her son about it. Jesus responds, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me.” I want to say, “I’m not sure I like your tone here young man.” I think something got lost in translation yet still it sounds snippy!

Yet, I do think Mary might be blowing things out of proportion. Worrying about wine at a wedding seems pretty trivial when there are so many major problems in the world, then and now. That may be what Jesus is thinking when he says it isn’t his hour to reveal his glory. Maybe he’s anticipating bigger things - soon he will heal a man who is paralyzed, feed 5000, raise Lazarus from the dead, and then rise from the dead himself. Those things are certainly more important than not enough wine at a wedding. Seems to me that Jesus could sit this one out.

Yet, Mary knows better. Mary knows that wine at a wedding is really important. Weddings are the one time the people in her community don’t have to work, don’t have to wonder if they’ll have enough for the next meal. Weddings are much needed respites from the toil and strain of life under Roman occupation. They are week long celebrations of family, community, faith. Wine plays a central role - not because people are drunk all the time but because wine is the sign of a good harvest, of God’s abundance. Wine represents joy and gladness. It’s a way to show hospitality. So, if the wine runs out, it’s like the blessing of the whole event run out.

Mary knows how important it is for her community to have some joy and gladness amidst the struggles of their daily lives. I would guess she knows that deep in her bones. She knows what people who suffer deeply know - joy has a way of defying the power suffering, of letting you rise above what wants to keep you down. Joy is a form of resistance. Besides, it sounds like this is just day three of seven days with all her friends and relatives. If the wine is gone already, it’s going to be a really long week. Mary knows people are gonna need some levity, some laughter, some joy.

So, Mary just ignores Jesus’ objection and tells the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” She is bold to ask for joy, to expect joy.

Jesus responds. Ordinary water is turned into the best wine. Worry and scarcity do not prevail. Abundance and blessing flow.

This story becomes really significant - the first of seven signs that Jesus performs to show his glory, according to the Gospel of John. It gets in the top seven with all those seemingly more IMPORTANT things like healing people, feeding 5000 and raising Lazarus from the dead.

And the way the story is told in John, there are echoes of the resurrection too. The story begins, "On the third day there was a wedding". We're supposed to hear the resonance there - on the third day God raised Jesus from the dead.

So, it turns out Mary is right (as mothers often are!). Wine at a wedding, joy in the face of suffering is not so small. It is no less important than addressing the MAJOR PROBLEMS in our world. Joy has a lot in common with resurrection.

Joy says to suffering, oppression, sorrow, and grief, you do not have the last word, you cannot keep us down, life and hope will prevail for us, for our world. Joy is a form of resistance.

Yet, often it can feel like the wine of gladness and joy has run out - the jar emptied, the blessing depleted.

Thankfully, it is not up to us to manufacture joy on our own, to make sure we always have a ready supply of what brings gladness.

We have a savior who uses ordinary things to give us the gift of joy - bread, wine, water, words and community. Jesus uses these gifts to assure us of God's abundance, to shower us with God's blessings, to nurture our joy always.

The joy Jesus gives is not dependent upon our circumstances, not dependent upon our ability to feel happy or glad. We see it arise in the hospital room, at the funeral, after the natural disaster, in the prison cell.

The joy Jesus gives isn't an individual gift either; it is given to the whole community. This means that even when joy seems out of reach for us personally, others can hold out hope for joy on our behalf - the way Mary did for the hosts of the wedding.

We can do this for others, as well, when they are enduring depleting circumstances like depression, grief, oppression or violence. We can ask for joy for them and trust in the hope of joy for them.

I see all this happening through the Neighbors Helping Neighbors initiative in our community. This initiative supports neighbors impacted by an immigration related crisis. It works to raise funds and to address crucial needs. But it hasn't just raised funds, it hasn't just addressed the MAJOR PROBLEMS.

This initiative has nurtured joy. The immigrant neighbors served have worked with other neighbors to gift our community with a Fat Tuesday Feast last February, the Immigration Fiesta at Pulpit Rock Brewery, and the Epiphany Fiesta earlier this month. These events have raised funds, but they've also been occasions of gladness and celebration.

God has worked through these events and through the gifts of tamales, beer, soup, bread and community. God has used these ordinary gifts to remind us of God's abundance, to assure us that there is joy and blessing enough for all. We need not jealously guard our resources, we need not be afraid.

I see this joy happening in the Decorah Community Meals, as well. Those meals nourish gladness and laughter. People in need are fed, but the meals aren't just about addressing the MAJOR PROB-

LEMS. They build up the community so that together we can have joy, together we can resist the forces that lead to hunger and the poverty of both body and spirit.

Joy is so essential, and God gives us joy in abundance.

Today, God comes to you in ordinary things to give you joy. God comes in the water of baptism, the bread and wine of communion, the peace shared, the promises spoken. God comes in the laughter of children, the music freely given, the fresh snow, the sunshine, the food in fellowship hour.

God gives you and each of us these gifts so that together we can hope, together we can resist, together we can nurture joy for one another and for our world.

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.