

January 16, 2022, 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after the Epiphany  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Decorah, IA  
Rev. Amy Zalk Larson  
[Click here to read scripture passages for the day.](#)

Joy

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."  
Something may have gotten lost in translation, but Jesus sure sounds snippy to me!

I do wonder, though, if Mary *might* be blowing things out of proportion?  
Worrying about wine at a wedding seems awfully 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'll heal a man who is paralyzed, feed  
5000, raise Lazarus from the dead, and then rise from the dead himself.  
Clearly, those things are more important than not enough wine at a wedding.  
Seems to me 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 blessings of the whole event run out.

Mary knows, how important it is for her community to have some joy and gladness  
amid the struggles of their daily lives.

I imagine 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 3 of 7 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-  
to remember that on another 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.  
I know so many of you feel like that right now.

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 and wine, water and word, the community of the church,  
silence and song, the gifts of creation.  
Jesus uses these gifts to assure us of God's abundance,  
to shower us with God's blessings, to nurture our joy.

The joy Jesus that 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.  
We can ask for joy for them and trust in the hope of joy for them.

As followers of Jesus, the One who serves others by bringing joy,  
we are called to help others experience joy. As we do, we taste it ourselves.  
Service draws us into relationship with others, lets us engage in hopeful activity,  
and gives us a larger perspective- it brings joy.

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 bread and wine of communion,  
the peace shared, the promises spoken,  
God comes in the laughter of children, the music offered,  
the fresh snow, warm homes, worship that reaches you in your home.

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

Let's take a moment for silent prayer.