

Sermon: In Vino Veritas

Scripture: John 2:1-11

Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans

Date: January 23, 2022

So I've got wedding on my mind, not just because of this scripture that we were given for this week but as some of you know a couple of weeks ago our eldest daughter Haliana became engaged to her long-time boyfriend Daniel, who, did all of our video editing during the pandemic before we started going live-stream. They are making plans for the wedding sometime in the next couple of years and I don't think I'll do the wedding though I've done so many across the years but I'll just be the dad to walk her down the aisle and sit beside her mom and cry. Not out of sadness, Daniel is a very good guy and we are happy he'll be a part of our family but the whole thing of her being our little baby girl which feels like just a couple of years ago and now starting her own family makes me emotional just to think about it. It's a great joy that she has found love and will be sealing it with vows of a lifetime commitment.

Marriage and the spousal relationship, is a significant motif that appears in scripture to articulate what it means to be in relationship with God and to understand what we mean to God, from a Judeo-Christian perspective. There's also the parent-child metaphor, the shepherd-sheep metaphor, the King-vassal metaphor and others, but there's a special place for this spousal, marital metaphor between Israel and God which places love at the center of the relationship; love and fidelity, passion and duty as well as union, consummation, and the birthing of new life.

But the heart of it is covenant. The Hebrew scripture explains our relationship with God as a coming together freely into a relationship of mutuality

and love. It could so NOT be that... we could be the Creator God's puppets or machines or slaves but instead we are given love by God, asked for our hand in a marriage of sorts and we respond with our "I do" ... or "I don't". I explain to couples I'm marrying that the reason we have the words of intent where the presider asks "do you take this man, do you take this woman" is to establish that this is a relationship entered by each party freely out of love with no force involved – it is a notion of marriage based upon Israel's covenant with God that it comes about not through arrangement but through an experience of the heart and a choice of free will.

If this is how God the omnipotent one operates with us then we see that God has chosen to curtail God's own power and control, in order to ensure and safe-guard that it is one of freely chosen love. And yes, it also means we can choose not to be in relationship with God, that we are free to choose less than love, but that is the risk God is willing to take for the sake of love, a risk that had grave consequences at the still turning point of history when Jesus embodied God's love and for it was put on the cross, the very symbol of freely chosen love, the very image of the consequences of that love in a harsh world and how those dire consequences won't deter love and love's purposes.

But given that covenant and the spousal relationship is a metaphor that the Hebrew scriptures use for God relating to God's people, it is not surprising, that after the first chapter of the Gospel of John where much of what John says about Jesus reflects the opening chapter of Genesis – in the beginning was the word –he would immediately share the story of Jesus at a wedding feast, the bride-groom has arrived. And what he notices when he joins the party, thanks to his mother, is

that the wine offered for this great celebratory feast, the spirit for the gathering, has run dry.

Mary turns to Jesus and says – “do something!” And for John what Jesus does is a sign for things to come, the first of the 7 signs that Jesus does in the Gospel of John, each sign revealing to people in ever widening circles the nature of who Jesus is and what he is going to be about. And here at the outset we catch a glimpse of what Jesus is going to be about and wow, it’s awesome!

He looks over and chooses 6 huge stone jugs that were designed to hold gallons and gallons of water for the Jewish purification rights and he tells the servants to fill them with water and then take some out and bring it to the head server and, as we know, what the server discovers is that in the jugs is no longer water but the most delectable wine! The quality and the abundance is astounding! The head server whose managing the party thinks it’s the groom’s family’s doing but the servants know what happened and see it as a sign of Jesus’ glory. A sign and a premonition for what is to come when Jesus will pour out this life for the sake of the world and the Holy Spirit will come in abundance to bring joy. You see the old rites of purification and sacrifice would no longer be needed for through Jesus’ sacrifice a purification has happened that has broken through the barriers and impediments in the human heart to the presence and activity of the Spirit of God and that Spirit which merely sustained us as water becomes the wine that gladdens the Spirit and gives the glimpse and foretaste of eternity to come.

It’s so excessive, this first sign of Jesus’ in the Gospel of John – upwards to 180 gallons of fine wine! It boggles the imagination! But it also reminds us here at the outset that even though this story goes to some dark places and seems to

end in tragedy and grief, it is ultimately a story, actually THE story of greatest joy, a joy that is equivalent to love having been found and committed to and consummated, as in a wedding, where everyone around the couple is dancing and drinking for joy that the very thing they were made for, to be united with one another and completed one in another, has been fulfilled!

I sometimes wonder if in our serious religiosity we too often forget or run rough shod over the JOY that is a big part of the story and there's a little too much furrowed brow and gritty determination to be better and to do what is acceptable and respectable and be adequate for God's purposes in us... while Jesus is stumbling in with overflowing jugs of wine saying who wants to party with me!! There's this one cartoon of the changing of water to wine which has him standing before a big clay jar with other 1st century Mediterranean people looking into the big jug and the title says "Jesus turns water into Vitamin Water" and Jesus is saying to the people who look a little disappointed "try it before you say anything!"

No, when Jesus comes he doesn't bring vitamin water to improve our health he brings 180 gallons of fine wine to increase our joy! It's how the Gospel of John begins - with abundance, excess, joy, celebration, as in a wedding feast! And it's how it will end as well, beyond the disciples wildest imaginings, the Holy Spirit overflowing the banks of their hearts and communities and spilling out into the streets! Now granted there some difficult places it goes before it gets there, but the darkness is what frames the light, the sorrow makes room for the joy. Each year during Advent at the Service of Light we read the poem by Kahlil Gibran that says "the deeper the sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can

contain. The selfsame well from which your laughter arises was often times filled with your tears. How else can it be?" (Kahlil Gibran - On Joy and Sorrow)

The marriage metaphor is an apt one because one of the commitments in the marriage vow is usually to stick with one another despite through poverty and sickness and sorrow... which carves the channel for joy. Freud said once "the essential thing in heaven and earth is that there should be a long obedience in the same direction there thereby results and has always resulted in the long run something which has made life worth living." The long obedience carves out the channel for joy to run deep, not mere happiness but joy filled up into great jugs and overflowing and the same commitment we offer to husband and wife is that that we are to offer to God in the very Spirit of Jesus Christ, the one whose life overflowed the rim of the tomb and poured himself - and continues to pour himself - into human lives bringing healing and joy, amen!

Announcements – Your Leadership Team and Treasurer and Associate Treasurer have worked hard to prepare our budget for 2022 and we'll have a zoom slide presentation and question and answer session at 1pm next Sunday, and the vote will come the following Sunday, Feb 6. We Thank you for your generous response to our fall pledge drive which has set us up in a solid situation for this year even with the unusual expense year we will have with the implementing of the strategic plan involving among other things the hiring of our Live Stream technician as well as a new Associate Pastor who will join us as an addition to our current staff before we re-arrange our staffing structure over the next couple of years.

Also on Tuesday night we will have a Healing Circle on Zoom and we encourage anyone who needs healing prayer for yourself or someone you love to come join us or if you just want to be in prayer together. We are still hosting these on Zoom for the time being but they are still lovely prayer times which you now if you've ever come to one. So that's 7pm on Tuesday night.

Benediction

Go forth taking God to be yours, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health to love and to cherish... and know that even death will not part you from God, in Jesus' name, go in peace, amen!