

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany  
January 20, 2019  
Text: John 2:1-11

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Last Sunday during Coffee Hour, a friend and I were marveling at the spread of goodies that were laid out on the table downstairs in Fellowship Hall for everyone to share. There were so many delicious-looking deserts that it was almost overwhelming. They looked so wonderful! How could you not try one of the chocolate chip bars, and one of the raspberry streusel bars, and one of the chocolate-covered peanut butter bars? With a little ironic humor, I suggested that we might have to ration the cheesecake bars. It was a truly impressive-looking show of abundance.

Our gospel story for this morning is about abundance. As the Gospel of John tells of the beginning of Jesus' work, Jesus' first miracle is to change water into wine—and not just a little wine. The six stone jars that Jesus instructed the servants to fill with water each held 20 to 30 gallons, which means Jesus' gift to the wedding party was between 120 and 180 gallons of wine. That's the equivalent of 600 to 900 bottles of wine! That's an incredible abundance. It also seems to suggest that the wedding celebration wouldn't be winding up any time soon.

But doesn't it make you wonder? Water into wine as Jesus' first miracle? Doesn't it seem just a tad... frivolous? Not feeding the hungry or healing the sick, but making a serious amount of wine? And yes, that's exactly how John wants to introduce Jesus' work to us. John wants us to understand that this miracle is a sign, and a sign isn't important in itself. It's important for what it points to, what it signifies. John says this sign revealed Jesus' glory. It showed who he was and why everyone should pay attention to him. And John wants us to recall how the prophets of the Old Testament pictured a great feast, with good wine flowing freely, as a mark of God's triumph over death, when tears and crying and mourning will be no more. So, when Jesus turns water into wine, it's not frivolous at all. Instead, it's a sign that identifies him as the One who brings God's good desires for the whole human family to fulfillment.

In a world that is always concerned about not having enough, Jesus shares the abundant love and compassion of God that will never run out. In a world where there is so much fear and worry and self-centeredness, Jesus connects us to God and each other, uniting us in love so that our lives can become expansive expressions of God's abundant mercy and care, which run deeper than we can ever imagine. The Gospel of John wants us to see that abundance is what Jesus is all about—abundant

love, abundant mercy, abundant forgiveness, abundant life that has no end. Just contemplating this sign of God's extravagant abundance revealed through Jesus, can you feel the muscles in your jaw relax? Any tension in your shoulders melt away? Because God provides enough for everyone, and more than enough. That promise can help us become less anxious, more generous, less worried, more joyful.

And there's more! Being aware of how God blesses abundantly and loves abundantly and forgives abundantly gives us valuable perspective on some of the profoundly difficult things about this life. Looking out on the world, it's easy to focus on the abundance of trouble and the abundance of suffering. Just a glance at the newspaper on any day can be almost enough to break your heart. But remembering how God provides abundant blessing through the overflowing goodness of creation, it reminds us that the abundance of violence and hunger and suffering is a human creation. The abundance of pain grows out of every act, large and small, of fear and greed and indifference to others.

And that's exactly why this story of Jesus turning water into wine is so important for the Gospel of John. This is how John describes what Jesus is up to. Jesus is the expression of God's love and compassion for the human family, all wrapped up in flesh and blood. And his very first action is to give a glimpse of the alternate reality God wants us to live in, a glimpse of this beloved creation made whole and well, and the human family enjoying and sharing its abundance.

And really, it's only an experience of abundance when it is shared, when it creates community and connection between people. Coffee Hour last week was so much fun because people could share all the delectable treats together while they also shared what was going on in their lives, visiting and telling stories and catching up with each other about what happened last week or what's going to happen next week. If each individual person had been given a huge baggie of treats and sent out the door, that would not have been an experience of abundance. It would have just been a lot of calories—but no abundance! The abundance God gives is to create relationships and restore relationships. It's for creating community, not for individual hoarding.

And I wonder if that's the biggest challenge for us, as Americans, in reflecting on this story of water turned into an abundance of wine. As a culture, it seems to me that we have a tremendously difficult time with the concept of abundance because we're inclined to imagine that it has to do with individual possessions. Advertising works overtime to convince us that we don't have enough and we need more. But if anything is just for me and mine, then it doesn't matter how much of it there is. It's

not an abundance, it's just a bunch of stuff, hoarded and monopolized. Abundance is the gift of God to provide for our needs and bring us together, creating community where we experience life abundantly.

Children of God, Jesus is showing us the world as it could be, the human family as it could be, as God intends for us to be. It could be like the biggest party you could imagine, where joy overflows as people connect with each other and belong to each other and care for each other. And more than simply showing it to us, Jesus also invites us to follow him into that world, where God provides abundantly and there is enough for everyone. Where those who have, share. Where justice that includes all people is as abundant as the wine overflowing those big stone jars at a wedding long ago. Can you hear? Jesus is inviting us to begin to live in that world already. Thanks be to God. Amen