

“Just Warming Up (We Should Do This)”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia
Season of Epiphany, Sunday, January 20, 2019
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Scriptures: John 2: 1-12 (NRSV) -- The Wedding in Cana

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.

¹² After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days.

We Should Do This

So, there’s some confusion around these parts,
confusion about what, or who, the We means
when you hear me say, “We should do this.”

Your church staff figured out some time ago
– our congregation figured this out two weeks into our beginning almost 21 years ago! -- that
whenever I’m discussing a project or program or prayerful ministry,
and then say, “We should do this,”
the “we” means “you.”

You should do this, and I will be eternally grateful.
Your church staff went so far as to make a lapel button for me to wear.
The button reads” “We Should Do This.”

At the same time,

we have active church members who also say, "We should do this."

However, as soon as you and I turn around,
the project or program or prayerful ministry is already set up,
spit-spot, raring to go with bells on,
because to these good folks, "we" means "me."
And the Church is eternally grateful.

At the same time, sometimes "We should do this" means just that:
We should do this, be this, become this, for the glory of God.
"We" means "Me and Thee, the Church and Community."
We should do this, together, and Christ is eternally grateful.

Today's Holy Scriptures from John speak to this dynamic.
Whenever God's Word says, "We Should Do This!"
does we mean you, or me, or the collective we?

Consider what happened at the wedding in Cana of Galilee.

Now, let's be clear: this was not Jesus' wedding.
Yet Jesus was very much present, a guest along with his disciples,
invited to be present and share in the joy.

Evidence suggests that his mother, Mary, may have been connected to the hosts.
You see, we infer this info because she knew the inner workings of the event.

Wedding celebrations and parties in those days may last as long as a week.

The whole village would be invited,
maybe even surrounding villages and hamlets,
all made welcome, at home, wined and dined.

Good Good Vibrations would, could and should flow...for as long as a week.

Such a party required, as you can well imagine,
a lot of prep both in advance and throughout the fun.
The hosts might leverage all they had to make the party happen.
At weddings folks rejoice in their family name and heritage
being passed on to the next generation.
Folks rejoice in the partnership we have with God,
and our relationships with one another.
Folks rejoice because, well, it's fun!
Gotta dance!
Shake tail feathers!

Raise voices & a glass! *L' Chaim! To Life!*
We should do this!

John's Gospel opens with what could have been a disaster, chaos in the making.

"On the third day" of the wedding celebration in Cana of Galilee "the wine gave out..."
Mary, the mother of Jesus, said to him, "They have no wine."

Only someone connected to the hosts could have been privy to this dread fact:
at the halfway point the party, the gathering for joy, was in danger of dying.

Jesus said to Mary,

"Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?

My hour has not yet come."

Mary might have been thinking, "Oh, no. We will not have a failure to launch."

Instead Jesus' mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

John Burns observes in his book, Modelling Mary in Christian Discipleship,
that in the Gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John –
one can substitute the Church for the name Mary.

Mary represented the Church:

she served as a model for the community of faith.

Try it for yourself.

Change out her name in the Gospels with the words The Church.

The Church says to Christ, "*They have no wine.*"

Jesus Christ! Our party is starting to die out;

our rejoicing will grow shallow; please, Lord, replenish us!

Fill our cups to overflowing.

Sustain us, refuel us, restore us for your purpose.

The Church says to the servants, to the helpers, to those milling around:

"Do whatever God tells you."

Follow the Word and Will of the Holy One.

Instructions will be forthcoming.

We should do this...

We – meaning you and me -- servants of the Living God

may be instructed to do something as straightforward and simple

as pouring water into vessels,

vessels of water to be transformed and shared

with the thirsty in our midst.

Did you ever fantasize that one day, someday, any day now,

God might ask you to do something great? Mighty? Something fantastic?

What if God asks you to serve a cup of cool water, a chalice of sacred wine,
an offering of grace to a waiting, nearby soul,
to be given freely, unconditionally, joyfully.

The late Fred Craddock said that he used to imagine God asking him
to write one large check to make a world of difference.
He said that looking back over his life,
he noticed instead that God had required him to write countless checks,
many, many of them small checks,
yet each one made a difference in the world.

We should do this...

Everyone has something to offer, to contribute, to provide
for the greater good, an offering to make the good greater.

On February 4, 1968, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
delivered his last sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church,
only five miles from here.

Titled "The Drum Major Instinct,"

the sermon was inspired by Mark 10:43 (NIV):

"Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant."

"If you want to be important, wonderful," said Dr. King.

"If you want to be recognized, wonderful.

If you want to be great, wonderful.

But recognize that [the one] who is greatest among you shall be your servant.

That's a new definition of greatness."

"And this morning, the thing that I like about it:

*by giving that definition of greatness, it means that everybody can be great, because
everybody can serve..."*

"You don't have to have a college degree to serve.

You don't have to make your subject and your verb agree to serve.

You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve.

You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve.

You don't have to know the second theory of thermodynamics in physics to serve.

You only need a heart full of grace, a soul generated by love.

And you can be that servant."

We should do this...

Making the rounds on social media
is a photo of a sign above grocery store shelves

that simply says, *"Bottled Water for Sale"*.
On the shelves, however, are rows and rows of bottles of wine.
"Clearly Jesus has been here," declares the Meme.

Mary the Church knew -- she knew! —
how the seemingly mundane may bloom into pure joy,
how God transforms the ordinary to become extraordinary.
Mary spoke for The Church when she turns to God and said,
"They have no wine."
Jesus then instructed people to fill vats with water,
water meant for purification,
water in jars intended for spiritual cleansing and cleaning,
and then God transformed it into wine,
into sacred refreshments for a celebration of life, of life,
of family and faith, of church and community.

You know as well as me that the wine of which we speak
is far more than a product of the fruit of the vine.
Throughout the Holy Scriptures
wine is a symbol and reminder of the blessings of God,
a symbol and reminder of our partnership with the Holy,
a symbol which we partake in remembrance of Him.

And when the Steward tasted the water-turned-into-wine, he said, *"Wow!"*
Wow! *"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."*

Wow.
We are talking extravagant.
This is what God creates, craves, completes.
An overwhelming abundance of the good stuff,
right when the party needs it the most.
When the Church looks to God for life,
God provides life in abundance,
so that God's joy may be complete.

As Jesus said, *"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."* --John 10:10
*"I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you,
and that your joy may be complete."* --John 15: 11

Here is what complete joy looks like, tastes like, feels like...

Water is transformed into wine...the best stuff.
Stones become living bread...food that sustains for the journey.

A cross of death bears witness to life everlasting,
a vivid symbol of the amazing grace of God's forgiveness,
a forgiveness that spills over into our forgiving each other,
time and time again.

God's joy is made complete as hardened hearts are softened,
closed minds are opened,
tight fists become helping hands.

Talk about the Wow Factor!

We can do and be anything, anywhere, anytime
when we pull together and do whatever God tells us.

We should do this...

They say a woman was stranded on a deserted island for years.
At last a sailboat came into view.
The woman frantically waved, jumped and shouted
until she captured the skipper's attention.
The skipper deftly landed near the beach
then jumped out to greet the stranded soul.
After a while the skipper said, "I see you have three huts. Tell me about them."
"Well, I live in the one with the nice view," she said.
"What's the next hut for?" asked the sailor.
"I built that one to go to church."
"What about the other hut?"
"Oh, that's where I used to go to church."

We should do this...

Imagine what we should do and become as conduits of hope.
"Do whatever He tells you," says Mary speaking as the Church.

Suddenly, happily, the transformation at a wedding in Cana of Galilee
takes on new dimensions, new directions, new discussions.
Jesus directs a rag-tag bunch of misfits, saints and sinners, followers and folks
whom the world cannot imagine being in the same room together,
who suddenly become water transformed, fermented wine,
blessings now blessed into a Living Hope,
a Living Body, a Living Community of Grace.

We should do this...be this...become this...

All of us, together, here,
where we means me and thee, the church and community.
We need each other, to hear one another,

to speak the truth in love, to go deep and to care even deeper.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. faithfully observed and acted on his belief
that if we are to live fully into the lives that God intends
then we need to create the beloved community, together.

We should do this!

Be warned that should we neglect to do so, said King,
the result is to create chaos.

We have the power to choose: chaos or community?

What should we do?

Whatever we chose to create makes all the difference.

In Dr. King's Letter from Birmingham Jail, dated April 16, 1963, he wrote:

"I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states.

I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta

and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham."

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality,

tied in a single garment of destiny.

Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

"I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be,

and you can never be what you ought to be

until I am what I ought to be.

This is the inter-related structure of reality."

So, you see, "we" does mean "you!"

We can do this... 'cause we're just getting warmed up.

All Power Be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!