

Epiphany 1 NL 2022

John 2: 1-11

January 9, 2022

I've had the joy of officiating at a lot of weddings. Sometimes, it's the couple who picks the Scripture readings—and sometimes they ask me to. As a part of the process, we have 4 pre-marital counseling sessions. It's an amazing thing to be a part of—and an honor—and getting to know the couple as a couple helps me figure out what scripture to choose.

You might think that this story of the wedding at Cana would be a go-to story for weddings—but I've chosen it only once—this past August for Sharon Senghor and Jack Reid's wedding. It seemed such a natural choice because Jack really delights in good food and wine—and Sharon enjoys sharing it with him. They weren't 20 somethings getting married—they'd both been around the block a time or two and it struck me as beautiful that they'd found the good wine in each other at this point in their lives.

This wedding was in the middle of the delta wave of COVID, and we were aiming for a short ceremony of about 15 minutes, so I didn't give any kind of homily. There wasn't any kind of formal reflection on this story. But this scripture was lived out in the celebrations—filled with good food and wine—that surrounded the ceremony—much more beautifully than I ever could have put into words.

It is actually a Jewish commandment to rejoice with the couple on their wedding day. There's an obligation to go celebrate with them so they would feel joy.

And wine was always a big part of that. So, it's a big deal when you run out of wine—because when you run out of wine, you're not able to properly celebrate.

I was searching for stories about celebration—and honestly, so many of them were about curtailing and scaling back. The only recent holiday that seemed to be no-holding-back was Halloween. You could really see it around us in the decorating—it was like people poured all their pent-up celebration energy into Halloween. A few even had fun with catapulting candy to the trick or treaters.

But a few short weeks later, we were worried about Thanksgiving—scaling it back and testing to keep it as safe as possible. Christmas and New Year's were quieter still.

It's like we've run out of wine—and it's hard to properly celebrate. And the wine we've run out of isn't actual wine but the joy that comes from being able to be together with people we love and care about—being able to do that without the fear of COVID lurking in the background.

But Jesus has been invited to this party, too.

At the wedding, his mother is paying attention and she *sees* the wine has run out. She tells him and she kind of doesn't take no for an answer. She expects—she trusts--him to do something so they can really celebrate.

And what Jesus does is *so great* and *so hard to figure* all at the same time. He has the servants fill up these massive jars with water and he changes them to wine. 120-180 gallons of wine—how in the world are they going to drink all that?

This is an amazing miracle—a sign is what the Gospel writer John calls it. The point of this miracle is to reveal the glory of Jesus—but the problem is the only people who know what Jesus did are the servants—and his disciples. For a public ministry launch, it is so under the radar. So much so that the credit actually goes to the bridegroom for serving such good wine instead of to Jesus.

At a point where it looked like celebrating was not going to be possible, Jesus comes in, surprising everyone with what was needed—not in a bare bones way but in an extravagant, over the top kind of way.

One of the best stories of celebrating that I heard this week was about a group in Dallas, Texas called “Break Bread, Break Borders.” It was founded by Jin-Ya, the daughter of refugees from China. It's a catering business that brings together women who are refugees from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Burma and Nepal.

Five years ago, Jin-Ya organized a community dinner for refugees and new immigrants and their neighbors. It was important to her that the food be authentic and comforting, so she went to local refugee organizations asking them to connect her with women who liked to cook. A small group of women cooked the meal, featuring beloved dishes from their home countries for a gathering of 80 people.

In the weeks following the meal, requests started coming in for catering. And the women who cooked it said how much they had enjoyed the community meal but that what they really needed was jobs.

Like Jesus's mother played an important role in what Jesus did at the wedding celebration, Jin-Ya's mother inspired her to found Break Bread, Break Borders. Her mother had died just a couple of years before but her memory and spirit were very much alive. Jin-Ya remembered how, when they had first come to the U.S. from Taiwan, and were working in a Chinese restaurant, how her mother had mentored so many other immigrants and refugees in cooking—how she had used food to bring life and joy.

Jin-Ya talked with the women who had cooked the community meal about her vision for a catering/food service training business that would be more than a business. Even though they had translators, she was having a hard time communicating—until she brought out the picture of her mother. Then the women understood that it was about more than food. It was about celebrating someone you loved.

The women who are a part of Break Bread, Break Borders come from different places and speak different languages. But they have become a like a family and they have grown together—grown in confidence, grown in their catering and business skills, grown in their English ability.

Though they have come from different places—they have similar experiences of the upheaval that living in war-torn places brings. They have holes in their hearts because of family and friends they have left behind. They know what it feels like to not belong and to be isolated.

But when you see them in the kitchen, when you see them serving at one of the events they are catering, joy just pours out of them. It's over-flowing, abundant like those 120 gallons of wine—and there is celebration—not just in the party they are catering but in the kitchen—among the cooks and the servers.

Where is Jesus in this celebration?

Chef mentor, Rhoda Sweet describes the partnership this way: “A Christian chef met a Buddhist founder to bring Muslim women to cook in the basement of a Christian church—oh, and by the way, they’re going to serve at a Jewish synagogue. It sounds like the beginning of a joke!”

Talk about a sign—talk about being surprised with overflowing, abundant joy and wonder—talk about celebration being possible in circumstances we would not expect to be able to celebrate in. How can we celebrate in a time of such bitter cultural and religious division, in a time when hatred and resentment toward immigrants seems to be such a galvanizing force? That this could be happening at all—much less that this could be happening in Dallas, Texas is a miracle—a sign. Dallas is the new Cana.

And just like Jesus worked under the radar at that wedding in Cana of Galilee, Christ—the Love that is so abundant it knows no boundaries or borders—is at work in Dallas, Texas.

And just like his disciples saw it, we get to see it, too.

During the season of Epiphany, we celebrate seeing God revealed among us in new and unexpected ways.

May our hearts be open to seeing, and like the disciples, may we believe that God is among us.

Amen.