

Giving the Best
John 2:1-11
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
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Joe had worked in his field for several years now. He liked both the work and his clients. He liked the way his work both challenged his brain and engaged his body. But there came a point where he knew that his work wouldn't change and the challenge wouldn't increase unless he got his license.

The reality was that he and others already knew that he could do his boss' job. But the truth was that he couldn't get a promotion...he couldn't be considered a professional in his field without the license.

And most days he wasn't sure what stopped him. Sure, there were classes to take, but he'd already done some of them. And he liked to learn. Maybe it wasn't the classes that stopped him, but the test. He knew from others that most people had to take it more than once.

Was it uncertainty? Was it lack of confidence? Was it fear of failure? Was it that he didn't want to be just another person who had to take the test multiple times?

He told himself he liked being out in the field...working with his hands. He told himself he didn't know how he would do with a desk job, after all, that's what a promotion would mean. But while there was some truth to all of this, the reality was he didn't resist taking the chance just because he loved what he did. He was scared to fail. He wasn't sure he was ready.

But, finally, he knew he was ready. Well, maybe he was ready. What he really knew was that his mother was ready. It didn't matter how old he got or that he had a family of his own, she was still his mother. And she believed in him. She knew he could succeed.

And she told him that...all the time. Until, finally, he believed her. Or maybe he got worn down by her. But either way, he took the risk and he did it. And before he knew it, he had passed the test, he had gotten his license and a whole new world opened up for him.

But Joe wasn't the first to be influenced by his mom. Mothers for centuries, probably since the beginning of time, have been pushing their children to take the chance, to use their gifts, to be more fully who they were meant to be.

And Jesus' mother was no different.

Here we are in the second chapter of John. This is the gospel that begins with that beautiful prologue which tells us that the Word became flesh and pitched a tent in our neighborhood. Then the gospel writer goes on and talks about John the Baptist. And finally, by the end of chapter 1, John the Baptist has pointed others to Jesus, some of them have begun following him, and as others are curious about who he is, Jesus simply replies, "Come and see."

So, a few people have started following him...some people are starting to pay attention...but his public ministry hasn't yet begun in force. That is...not until his momma says so.

Jesus, his friends, his mom...they are all at a wedding in Cana in Galilee. Weddings in the middle east were big community affairs, often celebrations that lasted for days. They were, as ours are, times of joy and hope, times when friends and neighbors gather with family to wish the best for a couple. And here were Jesus and his family and friends celebrating at the wedding of an unnamed couple when, alas, they ran out of wine.

Perhaps the turnout was better than they expected. Perhaps they had tried to skimp on wine to be able to pay the florist more. Perhaps they just hadn't realized how much their neighbors could drink. But running out of wine was never good for the host.

Enter Mary, Jesus' mom. We don't know if she was the first to notice the shortage or if many people were talking about it. We don't know if she had a special role at this celebration or was just another guest who happened to be paying attention. But what we do know is that she had confidence in this boy she had raised. And so, when there was a problem she went straight to Jesus and had him take care of it.

And it's an interesting conversation because Jesus doesn't immediately jump at the chance to solve the problem. It's not, by any indication in the gospel, that he doesn't care about this wedding celebration or its hosts; it's not that he doesn't think it's important to serve your guests well. But his objection is that it's not yet time. He isn't ready – or isn't supposed to be ready.

We don't know if this was good old-fashioned nerves. We don't know if God had really sent a message with a start date for his ministry of signs and miracles. We don't know exactly why he held back, but his immediately response was simply, "What concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."¹

Seemingly, Jesus didn't think it was time for him to show people who he was. And yet, and as a mother I love this story because, he did what his momma asked. "My hour has not yet come," said Jesus. To which Mary replied by turning to the servants and simply saying, "Do whatever he tells you."² And can't you almost envision her just walking away with a little smile at the corner of her mouth, knowing that there would be wine.

See here's the thing about this story. It is easy for us – especially those of us of the mothering variety...and that's not just those with the official title of mom, but those who have nurtured and mentored and cared for and encouraged young people – it is easy for us to get so

¹ John 2:4, NRSV.

² John 2:5, NRSV.

caught up in the joy of watching Jesus give into the pressure of his mother that we forget to ask anything else about the story. Or it's easy for us to simply see this story as a transition into his ministry – as that first miracle after which we expect more people to follow him and everyone to be talking about him.

But, as we ask so often, what does this story offer us other than another aspect of Jesus to admire? What does this story teach us, not just about how amazing Jesus was, but about who we who claim to follow him are called to be?

Because, even though I might tell my children that this story is really about how good boys do what their mommas ask, that's not actually the point of it.

And even though this is the first of seven signs or miracles in the Gospel of John that help people come to understand who Jesus is, that may also not be the only purpose of this story. While John has a greater focus on Jesus' divinity than the other gospel writers, this story is about more than just showing the people Jesus' godliness.

So, what else is there for us here?

Well, let's think about the story.

First, it seems worth noting that Jesus takes time out to celebrate at a wedding. While we can affirm the importance of such celebrations in their culture, we also know that there are other examples in the gospels of times when people felt comfortable making excuses for not attending weddings – I need to go check out my new land; I just got married myself; I just bought a new work animal. And, let's be honest – if anyone has a good excuse not to show up for a wedding and stay around to celebrate, isn't it Jesus? Doesn't he have more important things to do? And yet, he shows up in the midst of the very real lives of people in his community.

That tells us something about who Jesus is – about how he shows up for us.

And it tells us something about the kind of communities we are called to create as those who follow him.

What would this world be like if we would slow down enough to celebrate with those who are celebrating, to grieve with those who are grieving, to pay attention to even the small joys and struggles that our neighbors are having, to create safe space for people to be real about their needs, their desires, their longings, their struggles, and their celebrations?

And then, there is something else in this text. When Jesus does provide a supply of wine, there is quite a conversation about the quality. Verses 9 and 10 read, “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 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.’”³

I suspect we often note that but largely read past that conversation. And yet what if we pause? What if we actually remind ourselves that Jesus doesn’t bring the least he can offer...he doesn’t bring just enough or the lowest quality. Rather, he brings the good stuff and brings it abundantly.

Again, this is something that we can celebrate – that our God is not one who asks us to live in scarcity but rather one who provides for us abundantly.

And, as those who claim to follow in the ways of Jesus, what if we did the same?

What if when someone needed a listening ear, we put down our phones and set aside our to do lists and chose to be fully present...to give our best?

³ John 2:9-10, NRSV.

What if when planning our budgets we didn't figure out what we would share *after* we worked in everything we might not only need but also want, but what if instead we asked how we could live more simply so that we could share abundantly?

What if when we took a load to the food pantry it wasn't only the past date, dented cans of food we would never eat anyway, but instead we took our favorites, the best we could provide?

What if we didn't give to our neighbors and our God only what was left over after our energy had been exhausted, but what if we made those things we claim to be important a priority in our lives and even in our schedules?

See, this story is about more than proclaiming Jesus' identity as the "Word become flesh." This story is also a reminder about the kind of God we serve – a God who intends good for all of us, a God who wouldn't give us the least or the worst, but who is always offering the best.

And this story points us to who we are called to be – those who in all things *give* our best and *are* our best in order that the world might know God's love.

May it be so.