

The God of Abundance

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Texts: John 2:1-12

Good morning, First Church. I am joining virtually from home with you this morning. Please know that I am holding you all in my heart and prayers as we ride yet another wave together.

As I sit here from home today with you and look at my glass of water... I wish it would turn to wine before my eyes.

Or better yet, into a bucket of ice cream. Lots of cookie dough bites. Now how cool would that be. In times like these, I think we can all use a miracle.

The number of folks I have talked to lately who have shared “I just don’t feel anything anymore.” “My emotions are a fog.” “My capacity to care has been dampened.” Another pivot. Another curve. Another exposure. Another quarantine. Some of us alone. Some of us at home with children, somehow working. All of us worshiping from home yet again. No wonder our brains, our hearts, our souls are just trying to catch up. Or maybe they are just so overworked they need to take a beat.

Maybe our responses are self-protective. We have been let down by bad news too many times these past couple of years.

Are you at your limit? Are you at your wits end? Or have you been there recently? I guarantee you that you are not alone. I am here to testify I have been more times than I can count.

And I am here to say that I have also been inspired recently. By our very own Christian formation committee to lean into imagination. I am inspired by Hilary to lean more into art.

I know one question we are exploring in 9:30 hour is the connection between imagination, faith and social justice. And on this Martin Luther King Jr. weekend, I am reminded of the power of dreaming.

I believe imagination and dreams to be at the heart of many social movements, if not incredibly necessary. In fact, it is women, it is black, Indigenous, people of color, women of color, queer and trans folks, who in this patriarchal and white supremacist culture who have and continue to do the work of imagining. How else do we build and create new spaces, new ways of living, where we can flourish as human beings? Where we can fully love and be loved? We need to dream. We need to imagine. We need to lift up and follow one another's dreams, especially our siblings of color who have been doing this work for lifetimes.

While I have been quarantining at home this week, I have had the opportunity to facetime with my mom and four-year-old niece. In one of my conversations with my niece, she told me “you just have to close your eyes and then you can do it.” I see my niece confidently imagining, imagining a world in which she as young girl can do anything – I could not be more proud.

This sermon feels pretty different from others I have preached in that I am trusting our imaginations to bring to life the good news in our passage today – through us and within us.

From the wise words of my niece, let us close our eyes together.

Imagine yourself 2,000 years ago at this wedding in Cana of Galilee. At this time, weddings typically extended over a period of five to seven days. Scripture just tells us that the wedding took place in the town of Cana near Galilee. And we can guess there is a ton of people given the six stone water jars, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. That is nearly 180 gallons total. What do you see? Where are you seated? What do you smell? What music do you hear?

I invite you to open your eyes and bear witness to how one artist, John August Swanson and what he imagined the wedding to be like.

This is entitled “Wedding Feast” by John August Swanson. Take a few moments to be with his art. Notice Jesus and Mary. The servants. The miracle unfolding. Critics say John’s art reflects the strong heritage of storytelling he inherited from his Mexican mother and Swedish father. He paints in oil, watercolor, acrylic and mixed media. When I look at this, I see many stories happening at once. I see music and joy. I also see wonder and mystery.

This is just one art piece. There is a lot more art out there, including the one you created in your mind this morning.

I now invite you to imagine yourself as Mary for a moment. And instead of turning to Jesus and saying, “they have no wine,” I invite you to look within yourself and ask yourself what you need.

Take a moment. Maybe the answer comes to you right away, maybe you need some time to reconnect with breath, your heartbeat.

Towards the end of 2021, Lexi Boudreaux sent me a reflection by Sarah Bentley- Editor of Building Faith and Associate for Christian Formation & Discipleship in lifelong Learning. Entitled: If you are exhausted, of course you are. Towards the end of her reflection, she shares how she often asks herself, “what should I do?” but in this unprecedented season, she finds herself asking “what do I need?”

I implore you to ask, what do I need? Maybe it is energy. Maybe it is forgiveness. Maybe it is hope. Maybe it is compassion. Maybe it is relief. Maybe it is strength.

And then say to Jesus, “I have no _____(and fill in the blank).”

For me, I find myself saying, patience. Patience for this surge to go down. Patience for quarantining. Patience to really listen and not just hear what I want to. But mostly, patience for myself. To say, hey it is okay to just take a beat. It is okay if this work is not your best. It is okay to be tired. It is okay to not be productive. It is okay that this task is taking longer than you think it should.

I invite you to share what is on your heart, shout it or whisper it. Cry it out. Laugh it out.

And then let us do as Mary says – Do whatever Jesus tells us. Jesus tells us to fill the jars with water.

At this time, I invite you to pick up that glass of water filled to the brim. Maybe a towel, too just in case.

If you were not able to grab some water – this is just another opportunity to deepen your imagination and visualize yourself holding a glass. The glass is so full, you have to move it slowly, so it does not overflow and spill.

Why fill it to the brim? Because I love this part of the passage. Seems like such a small detail, but it is not small at all. For this line reminds us that our God is a God of abundance. God wants us to have all the love and joy we can possibly imagine. God says to fill our glasses to the tippy top. Abundance is God's response to our needs.

Let us cheers in this good news like we are at a wedding and take a sip. As we drink, may the abundant love and grace of God flow through you.

I must admit, this is the first time I have spent a great deal of time with this passage, despite it being such a famous and well known one. It is the first time I realized that this is Jesus's first miracle or sign in the Gospel of John. Many commentators note that in the other gospels, the first miracles were explicit ones of healing - healing physical bodies, multiplying food for those hungry.

In John, Jesus's first miracle is turning water into wine. And yet some theologians have claimed Jesus's turning water into wine miracle as a healing miracle and not all that different from the first miracles in the other gospels.

I must say I agree. Notice this miracle happens on the third day of the wedding. I did some digging to see what theologians made of this... and many compare this third day to the resurrection. To new life. "On the third day he rose again." Jesus pours out new life in abundance for us. And so, yes, I do see this as a healing miracle.

We share our needs. Our despair. Our heartbreak. And then Jesus tells us to take our cup and fill it to the brim. Jesus's response to us is abundance. So that we can start again. So that God can renew our hopes and dreams.

Jesus's response is jars overflowing with peace, love, grace, and yes, maybe even joy – because we could all use it. In these challenging times, this kind of healing feels like extraordinarily good news to me. The wine will never dry up. Hope will never dry up. No matter how hard it will get, God will respond in abundance. Give us more than we need.

Siblings in Christ, I believe when we open our hearts, God will take the waters of impatience in us and turn it into self-compassion, the waters of despair in us and turn it into hope, the waters of worries in us and turn it into comfort.

May the good news of God's abundant love and grace restore us and renew us. May God's abiding presence help us continue to do the work of imagination. To dream with our Saint Martin Luther King Jr and all the cis, trans, non-binary, straight and queer black women who imagined and breathed new life with the help of the Spirit into social justice movements. Barbara Jordan, Ella Baker, Rosa Parks, Audre Lourde, Marsha Johnson, Bell Hooks, Nona Conner, Maya Angelou ... and so many more...

And let us say, Amen.

Benediction