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Abundant Grace

Leanne Darlington¹

Isaiah 62:1-5, Psalm 36:5-10, John 2:1-11

In ancient times a newly married couple did not take a honeymoon...they did not travel to Niagara Falls, Paris, or some exotic island for some rest and relaxation. The newlyweds had a reception that was organized by the parents of the groom....it was a large week-long party of food and wine, celebration and joy. Wine in ancient times was a sign of abundance, a sign of a plentiful harvest, and more often drank instead of water due to uncleanness. Running out of wine would have left the grooms family in a crisis in a culture of honour and shame. The thought of being publicly shamed in the community would have been disastrous for the family.

So perhaps this is why Mary went to Jesus and told him that the party had run out of wine, she would have understood the importance of hospitality, cleanliness, and the culture of honour and shame in antiquity. Or was there was something more going on here? Mary is only mentioned twice in the book of John, once at his first sign, and again at the foot of the cross. Mary witnessed Jesus' first revelation of glory and his last. Mary was Jesus' earthly mother, she knew him well, perhaps more so than anyone else. Had she seen a change in Jesus? Had she been watching him as he matured, instilling her trust in him, and encouraging him, knowing that this day was the time for him to make his ministry public? In John there is no birth narrative, there is no manger, no shepherds, no wise man. We are introduced to Jesus through the words of John 1:1-2, "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God and the Word was with God. He was in the beginning with God." Jesus came from God the Father, and to God he will return. However, Jesus' earthly mother is as important as Jesus' heavenly Father. Karoline Lewis states that "there is an implied shared parenthood between the Father and the mother of Jesus that holds together one of the major claims of John's Gospel, that the divinity and humanity of Jesus can never be separated."² The wedding at Cana is Jesus' first miracle, it is the first public sign of who Jesus is. It is a sign telling the reader that the divine Saviour has come to live in the world, that he will be rejected and left to die on a cross, but that he will be resurrected, he will have eternal life, and those who believe will also have eternal life.

Jesus' first response to Mary was that it was not his problem, his humanness was perhaps showing in that response....what child has not made that comment to a parent at one time or another regardless of age! Shortly after however for reasons unknown, Jesus responds to Mary's concern and asks the servants to fill up six stone purification jars with water, each holding twenty to thirty gallons (which is equal to roughly 900 hundred bottles of wine)! He then asks the steward to taste the water and astonishingly the water has become wine! The steward was surprised and confused; usually the wine became cheaper and less enjoyable as the party went on, the guests would be drunk by now and not care what they were drinking! But this wine, yes, this wine was exquisite and there was a large abundance

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² Karoline Lewis, *Fortress Press Preaching Commentaries: John*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 36-37.

of it! The groom's parents, (who would have been terribly ashamed for running out of wine) now would have been regarded with great honour for serving this exquisite and abundant wine. Jesus provided wine of great abundance and taste, he provided abundant grace, grace that could be perceived as the writer of John states in chapter 1:16, "from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace!" What does grace upon grace look like, smell like or taste like? It smells, and tastes like gallons and gallons of the most exquisite wine available for all to enjoy! God through the gift of Jesus Christ provides abundance for everyone, not just regular abundance, over the top, incredible, unbelievable abundance!

Now I have to be fully honest with each of you....I at first struggled with the message of the gospel reading this week. I struggled with the message of God providing this incredible abundance for all, because when we look at our world, we see and hear of many who are not in abundance, our hearts ache because of the injustice or lack of abundance we hear on a daily basis. We hear of leaders wanting to build walls to keep people out of a country. We hear of our Indigenous brothers and sisters living in Northern Ontario who do not have running water in their homes. Their water which is a necessity of life is trucked in and ends up contaminated because the cisterns that have been provided to store the water are full of bacteria and germs. There is not enough money budgeted to clean and disinfect them on a biyearly basis. We hear of people living on the street who are dying in clothing donation bins simply because they are either looking for shelter on a cold winter's night or trying to grab a piece of clothing that they can sell or barter. 8 souls have died over the past year. We hear stories of discrimination and hate, be it racial, sexual, or cultural. Where is the abundance of God for these people? Where is the grace upon grace that one can feel, taste and smell in a world where there just doesn't seem to be enough to go around?

There are no easy answers to these laments.

Our reading from Isaiah this morning speaks of the lament we feel in our lives, it speaks directly to God where the prophet states, "For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest." The prophet is not afraid to speak of the difficulties that he was experiencing, because he trusted in the power and glory of God, having faith that God would act on behalf of the people to bring good news and abundance to all.

God understands our struggles and our questions of pain and suffering in the world. God finds us when we are broken, when we are questioning, when we are empty and in the darkness. God enters into the darkness of our lives and brings the light of love, acceptance, and abundance into our lives. The abundance may not be physical, it is not something we can physically measure; the abundance is love and grace and a complete relationship with God through God's only Son, Jesus Christ.

Just as God revealed God's glory and power in the Old Testament, God again reveals the power, glory, and grace of Jesus at the wedding in Cana. God chose to reveal the glory of God's abundance at a wedding; a common somewhat everyday occurrence in ancient times, celebrating a new relationship and a new life for the bride and groom. The sign was not revealed in front of rulers, kings, and high priests, it was revealed in front of the servants (the lowly and poor who waited on the guests), the disciples and Mary, and they believed in him. In revealing the sign, Jesus introduces the presence of God to the ordinary in the everydayness of our lives; in the joys and happiness, in the pains and the sorrows.

We are like the guests at the wedding in Cana, each day we are invited to share in the abundance of God in our lives. Each day we are reintroduced to the humanity and divinity of Jesus Christ through the love of God. We taste the most exquisite wine, we see the beauty in our world, we form and build relationships with one another, we make a difference in the lives of those who suffer injustice, hurt and hate, we make mistakes, and we live into the promise of eternal life because we are beloved children of God. That is wonderful exquisite abundant grace, and for that I say, thanks be to God!