

## **Glorious Wine**

Psalm 36: 5-10

Isaiah 62: 1-5

John 2: 1-11

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### *Psalm 36: 5-10*

Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O Lord. How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your salvation to the upright of heart!

### *Isaiah 62: 1-5*

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

### *John 2: 1-11*

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 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." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Was it the Sermon on the Mount, or an exorcism for a man with an unclean spirit, or a return to his hometown that was Jesus' first public act of ministry? Matthew, Mark and Luke each tell of these three possibilities in their gospels, and each of these actions fit all that we know about Jesus' actions. Any of them are the perfect, fitting choice for a ministry that each of the Gospel writers say happened after Jesus was baptized, tempted in the wilderness, began gathering disciples and teaching the people.

But John, well John begins with a very unexpected first public step for Jesus, as he does not comfort, heal, or teach, but rather turns water into wine, into flowing, extravagant, perfect vintage wine at a small, rural wedding whose celebration had been going on long enough for all of the wine to be drunk. At a time when wedding celebrations were very public events that began on a Tuesday and lasted for a week of drinking, eating and celebrating, it truly seems odd, seems peculiar, that this could really be how Jesus' public ministry could have begun---yet, out of all four gospels, this event, this water-into-wine that could be seen as a parlor trick and not the launchpad of the ministry of Emmanuel, God-With-Us, is actually the most revealing of just who Jesus is across all four Gospel accounts.

John's Gospel is rich with symbolism and poetic writing with no details that are simply casual as he describes just who Jesus is. All is significant and symbolic and important. For John, signs are at the center of describing Jesus. Don't look at the everyday object, look to the deeper reality it points to. At the wedding in Cana, wine is not just wine.

In John's time, and long before, a wedding banquet was a symbol of the restoration of Israel, the redemption after the exile and the destruction of the Temple. A wedding banquet was a well-known image of salvation and the fulfillment of God's promises. The promise of a banquet at which all the faithful would meet and eat and drink good things to be provided by God had sustained the people of God through generations of struggle.

They sang of the future banquet with the psalms: They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights. O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your salvation to the upright of heart! The prophet Isaiah's words reassured them that they would no longer be termed Forsaken, and their land shall no more be termed Desolate; but they would be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

The image of the wedding banquet reminded the people that they, that we, are called into a relationship with God that can best be described in the loving language of marriage--a true and loyal commitment with the other, and all the tenderness and desire and daily reality that are evoked in the imagery of marriage. When Jesus began his public ministry in the midst of a wedding banquet by turning 6 jars of water—180 gallons of water—into an extravagant abundance of the finest wine, Jesus was offering publicly for the first time an extravagant abundance of grace to show them, to show us, how much we are loved, desired and invited into a life so deep, celebratory, real and completely life changing that only the image of marriage comes close to expressing the magnitude of God's love for us.

In the wonderfully extravagant flowing glorious wine that first celebrated the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry and continues to flow so graciously and generously, what do we see being poured out for us? Where do you, where do we, need to allow some abundance to flow into our relationships and through our relationships to others?

Martin Luther King, Jr. would answer that question by speaking of the Beloved Community, a term he borrowed from theologian and philosopher, Josiah Royce. King used this term to describe the experience of God's kingdom in our lives today—those moments of abundant truth, joy and reconciliation that break in and call out our racial and social divisions. King deeply believed that Beloved Community was human community, a humanity infused with the Spirit and loyalty, and was the outcome of abundant goodness which remained possible if people committed themselves to nonviolence in the pursuit of justice.

The King Center in Atlanta says it this way: "Dr. King's Beloved Community is a global vision, in which all people can share in the wealth of the earth. In the Beloved Community, poverty, hunger and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it. Racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. In the Beloved Community, international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power. Love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred. Peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict."

The Beloved Community is water turned into the finest wine; it is water turned into glorious wine as it is the overflowing abundance of a banquet in which we will celebrate salvation and the fulfillment of God's promises. In the Beloved Community we have a shared hope for the future when all the faithful will meet and eat and drink, will feast on the abundance of God who had sustained the people of God through generations of struggle. No one will be termed Forsaken, and our land shall no more be termed Desolate.

Jesus began his public ministry with a miracle, a gift, a sign, so extravagant, celebratory and surprising that we can be in no doubt as to how much we are all loved, desired and invited into a life with him where the ordinary becomes the extraordinary. Christ pours out the best for all humanity, for the Beloved Community, as his glorious love flows like gallons of the finest wine. Amen.