

WGUMC October 14, 2018 “The Good Wine Now”
John 2:1-11

You’ve all heard Bridezilla stories. Even if you haven’t been to a wedding in a while, you’ve probably read a few in Ask Amy or Miss Manners. So you know that it’s typical for weddings these days to be major theatricals with a budget to match. Completely lost in the spectacle is the service of worship. The wedding itself is just a big, overly-done, break-the-bank prelude to a party. Not that I’m at all bitter!

Having ranted a bit, I can say that we recently did two very simple and simply lovely weddings right here in this sanctuary. We rejoice with Amanda and Manuel Lopez and Rodrigo and Silvia Abarca, and I have to thank both of these couples. Because there was so little hoopla, they reminded me that weddings can be holy.

They reminded me of something else, too. I was thinking that no matter how much the wedding costs, no matter what worries the bride and groom bring with them to the altar—about their future finances or job security or housing situation, all those things that

give rise to feelings of scarcity in us, despite all of this—weddings are really celebrations of abundance, the abundance of life and of love. No matter how jaded we may be, weddings are the one place where we allow ourselves to believe that all we need is love.

So, if you were wondering why Jesus goes to the wedding at Cana, I'd say that it's because love was invited to the wedding, so naturally he shows up.

John begins the story by saying that it was the third day after Jesus' baptism. That's intentional. John is making a not-so-subtle allusion to the third day after Jesus' crucifixion. That's our clue that something remarkable and memorable is about to happen, and I don't mean that the flower girl is going to projectile vomit on the maid of honor!

That something special that's going to take place at this wedding is the revelation of the Son of God. Turning water into wine was the first of seven signs, or miracles, in the Gospel of John that

reveal Jesus as the Son of God, each one of them pointing to the resurrection and the kingdom of God.

So, Jesus is invited to the wedding, and his mother is also there. But then the worst thing imaginable happens. No, the flowers didn't get delivered to the wrong address. No, the best man didn't lose the wedding rings. No, they didn't have to call security because the father and mother of the bride, long divorced, got into a brawl about who was going to sit where. It was far worse than that. They ran out of wine.

In the middle of the reception, Mother Mary looks to her son, and says, "They have no wine." But her son looks anything but willing to do something about it. Like a groom trembling at the altar, Jesus is not sure he's ready to take the plunge. He tells his mom, "What concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come."

It takes a woman, albeit his mother, to get him to commit. Notice that Mary doesn't ask him; she just tells him. And when he objects, she doesn't listen. Mary just turns to the hired help and

says, “Do whatever he tells you.” And like a good son, Jesus does whatever his mom tells him. He orders the servants to fill some jars with water and then to take a sample to the chief steward. When the steward tastes it, he can’t believe it. It’s like one of those Napa wines with which you could make a down payment on a bungalow in Willow Glen. Now everyone knows that doesn’t make any sense, bringing out the best wine just as everyone is getting too tipsy to notice it.

Hank and I were hiking the other day and talking about this story, and I got to thinking that getting drunk on cheap wine may be a good analogy for our lives on a lot of levels. Maybe we tried the good stuff once, but we’ve settled for life on the cheap. We had dreams, but now it’s whatever it takes to get through the day. We tasted God and it was so good, but then we got busy and distracted and now we go for the drive-thru. We pick up our spiritual fast food, slug down that sugar water, knowing it’s a cheap high, it’s just

empty calories and it won't strengthen our hearts or nourish our faith.

If Jesus hadn't come to the wedding, no one would have had any good wine. And that's our situation today. Think of our world as a wedding party where someone neglected to send Jesus an invitation, and we have run out of wine. Instead of celebrating love, we're griping and complaining about life. Instead of giving thanks to God, rejoicing in our abundance, we sit around empty tables fighting over crumbs.

Living and working in Silicon Valley, it's easy to get sucked into a mentality of scarcity. There's not enough money, not enough time, not enough housing, not enough hope. But that's only because there's not enough Jesus. It's my experience that whenever he shows up, the glass fills up. I felt it on Reconciling Ministries Sunday. We invited the Silicon Valley Gay Men's Chorus, but our guest of honor was Jesus. Someone remembered to invite him because I

could see it on your faces and even a few faces in the chorus. Your cups were full and running over that day.

That's our job as a church: always to invite Jesus to the wedding. Not only by the way we worship, but also by the way we live and work, we can bring a lot more Jesus into our world and get a lot more people believing that all we need is love. When love is here, when Jesus is here, everyone will have enough. When we invite Jesus into our lives, water turns into wine and a few loaves and fishes become a feast.

Something I've noticed about weddings. Despite how busy we all are, when the invitation from a good friend or family member comes we always seem to have time to go. We *make* the time. And no matter how poor we feel, we always manage to bring a gift. My friends, I'm inviting you to a wedding. The Bible makes a couple of references to the Church being the bride of Christ. [Eph 5:25; Rev 21:9] In that case, I'm asking you to make time to show up for the

groom and his bride, for Christ and his Church, and to make sure you bring a gift.

Think of this stewardship booklet, this ministry magazine, as a bridal registry. As we prepare for a party, I want you to think about the gifts you are going to bring. This isn't just any wedding. This wedding makes the Brits and their royal nuptials look like the mid-week special at a Vegas wedding chapel. We're talking about the Church getting married to the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords. So we don't just want to look our very best. We want to be our very best and give our very best.

And when we get to the wedding, remember that the bride and groom aren't the only ones who make vows. We have replaced the old bit about "giving away the bride" with a new bit that asks everyone to promise that they will, by God's grace, do everything in their power to uphold and care for this couple because they cannot hope to love each other very well or for very long without a lot of help. In the same way, the Church will fail to keep her vow to Christ

and will fail in her mission to bring his love into the world without all of us keeping our vows to uphold and support her for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health and forsaking all others until death do us part.

When we join Willow Glen United Methodist Church, we vow to pray for this church, to be present with our brothers and sisters here, to offer our gifts for ministry, to be available for service in the world and to be faithful in our witness to Jesus Christ. This bridal registry has pages and pages of possibilities, ways that all of us can keep our vows. You may think of other ways as well. Just as husbands and wives try to remember and renew their vows every year on their anniversary, every year we need to refresh our commitments to Christ and to his Church.

Another important thing to remember is that the Church is not the Red Cross or Habitat for Humanity or the Humane Society or the Nature Conservancy. Those are all wonderful organizations, and I applaud you for supporting them. But when we ask you to support

and care for your Church, we are not asking you to give to a charity. We are asking you to come to a party, to celebrate the abundance of life and of love made possible by Jesus Christ. Your gifts help us expand the guest list and serve the good wine, not after everyone has been here for hours and we have run out of the cheap stuff but right from the start, right now, as soon as you walk in the door.

If you ever wonder what Church is about, hear these words from God's Word in Isaiah [55:1-3a]:

Ho, everyone who thirsts,
 come to the waters;
and you that have no money,
 come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk
 without money and without price.
Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread,
 and your labor for that which does not satisfy?
Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good,
 and delight yourselves in rich food.
Incline your ear, and come to me;
 listen, so that you may live.