

## Drinking the Wine of Life

Rev. David Reynolds

John 2: 1-11

From a local county newspaper article in Maine about how to plan wine for your wedding reception, Jennifer Jordan wrote that “chances are we've all attended our fair share of weddings.” And so, she says, “as we sit through the ceremony, watching two people we care about exchange vows of love, forgiveness, and faithfulness, it's easy to ponder certain questions: Will these newlyweds live happily ever after? Will they have children? Will they stay with each other in sickness and in health? And, most importantly, will the reception have an open bar?”

Farther on in her article, Jordan offers this sentence which seems particularly pertinent to today's gospel lesson from John. She writes: “Running out of alcohol at a wedding reception ranks up near divorce on the spectrum of marriage, causing people, with opened mouths and clenched fists, to ponder why.” Well, as we delved into the deeper theological implications of John's story at Loaves and Fishes, Harvey pined for the days of his Sunday-School upbringing when the biggest thing to be debated about this text was whether or not it was real wine! Suffice it to say, it was real wine, but that's not really the point.

It is a problem when the wine runs out at a wedding reception. Because that's when people start to feel like the party is over, and they begin to leave. It's a problem because the party ends... this celebration of life and love, ends. But, you see, as John tells this story of this “wedding” in Cana, he immediately tips us off that he really wants to tell a much bigger story, because he begins this story completely out of the blue with the words, “on the third day.” “On the third day there was a wedding...” The third day? The third day of what? Well, the third day is supposed to immediately make us think of the resurrection!

As John tells this story, we would do well to think of the images from Isaiah that were read this morning of yet another “wedding,” of yet another “marriage.” You remember, those images spoke of the marriage between God, the bridegroom, and Israel, the bride. That's the real “wedding” that John wants to talk about. He wants to say that in Jesus, God is entering into a new marriage, a new covenant with creation. On the third day there was a wedding, and Jesus was there. Well, of course Jesus was there. Jesus is always there where God is. John has stated that in his theological treatise which begins his gospel and should be read into all of his gospel. “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Of course Jesus was there.

And so, as John tells this story, when the problem arises that the wine has run out, Jesus redefines what the problem *really* is, saying: “My hour has not yet come.” Now, in John's gospel Jesus' “hour” is his crucifixion. So, what John is really saying is: what God will accomplish in the cross of Christ had not happened yet. And *that's* the problem. Because of that, life, the true life, fullness of life keeps getting blocked. We experience life more like a wedding reception when the wine runs out. That's what this story's about. It's about a question that eats at us from deep within.

What in the world will ever save us when the “wine” of life seems to have run out? We do experience life that way, don't we? A quick glance at the newspaper will do it. Civil war in Iraq, religious and ethnic fear and hatred among us, in Northern Ireland, in the Middle East, and all around the world really, genocide in the Sudan and Zimbabwe. There's scapegoating all around, isn't there? We scapegoat our political leaders, they in turn scapegoat others and we join in: immigrants, muslims, the poor, homosexuals, the right, the left. It makes it hard to live and celebrate the gift of life we all share, together, doesn't it? It gets blocked. It feels more like the wine has run out.

And, of course, what we do in community with others we do also to ourselves. By projecting all the things in us, all the parts of our selves that we find fearful or unacceptable out onto somebody else, or some other group, what we also do is to cripple and let atrophy the very best and most humane parts of our self, the parts that seek to expand our understanding and compassion, the parts that can forgive. We cut our selves off from true, full life, too! So, what do we do with all this stuff in us and in our world that just isn't right? What do we do when life feels like a wedding reception when the wine has run out, when there is just no goodwill left for the *other* there inside us, or there across town or across the world from us? That's what this story is about. And John wants to answer that question.

John says of this story at the end of it that it was the first of Jesus signs, which point to his glory, that is, it points to his "hour." It points to what God accomplishes on the cross. You get it? In the cross God provides the "wine" for true life, for life in its intended fullness to continue! It's what we celebrate in communion when we say this wine is his blood, his blood is wine, the wine that enables the party to continue. You get it? In the cross God takes all the "jars" that we use for both religious and cultural "purification rites", all the ways we justify saying that some are acceptable and some are not (whether Jewish ways, Christian ways, Muslim ways, whatever) all the ways that we justify scapegoating and cut ourselves and others off from life, and says "these are empty, I will fill them and transform them for life's sake!" Because in the cross God lifts the veil from our eyes to reveal that He is not a God who ever seeks retribution, but a God who forgives and loves to the end.

God reveals that she is not a God who ever demands a sacrifice, who ever demands a scapegoat. God says, "I give myself to *your* demands for a scapegoat." So that we can see our lies that we have projected onto a loving God. So that we can see that whenever we scapegoat, it is God we crucify. So that we can stop and be reconnected to life, and be reconnected to others, and be reconnected to God. So that we can be saved.

What do we do with all this stuff in us and in our world that is just not right? God provides the "wine" of forgiveness that is the only thing that can open our eyes that we might be saved. In the cross of Christ God has indeed saved the best "wine" for the end, and enabled full life to continue! Friends, it is good news. Looking to the cross of Christ, drinking the blood which is his wine for us, the party can go on in full swing! We can stop scapegoating, and instead, taking *his* life into us we can model ourselves after who God *really* is, not who we've made Him. *God* is God, *we're* not. We can let that divine image in which we were created shine forth by practicing forgiveness of ourselves and others. It is our only hope for life. Look to his cross, and see there the wine of life. And believe in him.

Amen.