

**Readings:** Isaiah 62:1-5; Psalm 36:5-10; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11

Grace to you and peace from the God revealed to us in and through Christ Jesus. Amen.

I hope you'll allow me to begin by being blunt. For me, this morning at first glance, there is a disconnect between our story from the Gospel according to John and the story of our world this week.

Let me try to say it as plainly as I can... This story from the Gospel according to John, it's a story of a *miracle at a wedding feast*, right? It's a story of a celebration and cause for belief, is it not? But the story of our world this week (at least, the story as I've been hearing it told in many and various ways) is a story of a *destructive earthquake on an impoverished island*. It's a story of grief. It's a story of helplessness. If anything it's a story that causes us *disbelief*, isn't it?

And so, this week I can't help but take a leap off the diving board with a simple, a blunt question – Why read scripture? Why come together week after week to worship? Do we read the bible for distraction, like a good fiction novel, does the bible transport us out of the misery we see around us and in our daily lives? Is our worship just some “escape” from the world? How does Sunday morning connect to every other time of the week? And if we don't read the bible and go to worship to *escape from the world* or at least *distract us from it*, then how else might we explain this disconnect.

The distance couldn't be harder to cross, can it? ...between the reality that the story of the bible gets to with its miracles, its belief, its celebration and the current reality we find in the story this week of our world, with its grief, its helplessness, its disbelief?

Well, friends in Christ, as a good high school English teacher would tell us, let's go back to the story. Let's *read more closely*.

Hidden between the lines of the story of our world this week there were more than a few tales of hope. We might even want to call them miracles.

A story of a single bottle of water stretched out among several families. A story of medical personnel finding a way to make resources draw out beyond what one could imagine. A story of countries around the

world, overwhelmingly trying now to assist and accompany a country that's been ignored for decades. Even if we might wonder if they will be enough, still they are stories of hope. We might call them "counter-narratives." The story that moves beneath the surface.

But it's not just this story of our world this week that has a *counter-narrative* to it. Read the Gospel story with me a little more closely. We expect bible stories of divine rescue and this is where we get eventually, but buried there in the middle of this story, we find a tale of reluctance. We might even call it *divine reluctance*.<sup>1</sup>

It's right there in verse four of the second chapter of the Gospel according to John. Jesus responds to his prodding mother with a reluctance that's all too easy to gloss over if we jump too quickly to the end of the story. "What concern is this for you and me?" Jesus says. "My hour has not yet come."

I don't know about you, but when I listen to the story of our world this week (and most weeks, for that matter) – whether it's an earthquake or a tsunami, whether it's child soldiers in Africa or children right here in our state going to sleep hungry, waking up hungry – this is where I find the most real connection between the reality of the story of our world and the reality of the biblical story. *Divine reluctance*.

Maybe I'm a heretic. I've probably been called worse. But if we take the world around us at face value, doesn't it often seem like God *is somehow reluctant* to offer rescue? Doesn't it seem like there are far too few miracles in our lives, in our relationships, in our world when we really need them? We're not asking for much, are we? If it's so easy for God to turn water into wine, how about just some fresh drinking water for a couple million on an island that you and I could reach by airplane today?

Maybe I am a heretic, just for asking, but you have to admit, I've got a good example, a good role model for my heresy in the bible. It's the mother of Jesus. And she brings her questions, her concerns to Jesus. "When the wine gave out," the story says, "the mother of Jesus said to him, '*They have no wine.*'" *Look at the problem we're facing*, she tells her son.

And when Jesus shows his reluctance, "...what concern is that to you and to me?" When Jesus seems to say, *Who cares? Now's not the time*. Mary just keeps on working. She turns to the servants and takes matters in her own hands. Yet she still points us to Jesus, "Do whatever he tells you."

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<sup>1</sup> I borrow this phrase from Carol Lakey Hess, in *Feasting on the Word* (Year C, Volume 1), p. 260.

And I gotta say, I love what happens next. I'll be honest, it might make me a bad Christian, I don't know, but I love it even more than the miracle that comes later. I love it, and this week *it gives me hope*.

First, though the narrator pauses in the middle of the action and points over to the corner – six gigantic jars that are for religious ritual sitting there, we're told. And we realize they're empty when Jesus, for some reason no longer reluctant, says to them (the servants, that is), "Fill them up with water." Why does it give me hope? *Because it's so simple... and it's not at all where we would expect to find hope.*

When you go to a wedding reception, where do you hope to sit? Usually you want to be as close as you can to the action, right? And that's the head table, isn't it? That's where the toasts are made. That's where we get the best view of the bride and the groom. And usually the closer you are to the head table, the more likely you are to get to the head of the buffet line, right?

You don't want to be stuck way in the back, close to the kitchen, where you're distracted every time that annoying swinging door opens and closes. Where your conversation is interrupted by the loud talking from the kitchen. And where, when you finally do get to go through the buffet you have to scrape the bottom of the metal pan for a few, cold mashed potatoes?

But I love it. Because in this bible story, the real action takes place where you'd least expect it. In the kitchen. And the only ones that witness the miracle are the ones you'd least expect. *The people who work in the kitchen. The servants.*

"Fill those jars up with water," Jesus says.

Take what might sometimes seem to be the empty rituals of your religion and don't worry about anything else, just *use 'em*, fill them up. Take your prayer books, take your baptismal font, take your offering plates, take your table with its cup and plate, take your hymns and praise songs, take your houses of worship and *use them*. Go through the actions. "*And then,*" God says, "*taste & see what I can make with the work of your hands.*"

I love it, because Jesus doesn't say, "Alright servants, how many of you have a Masters of Divinity from an accredited seminary?" Jesus doesn't tell the wedding DJ to stop, he doesn't gather the whole head table around these big jars, he doesn't push back his cape and say, "Stand back everyone! This looks like a job for *Super-Jesus!*"

Jesus stays in the kitchen... with the servants. Jesus hangs out where there is work to do. Jesus tells the servants to do what they already know how to do.

“ ‘*Fill the jars with water.*’ And they filled them up to the brim. And he said to them, ‘*Now draw some out, and take it out to the world...*’ ”

I don't know why Jesus seems reluctant in the story today. I don't know why it seems like we live in a world with a reluctant God. I only know that as I look out today, I see a kitchen full of servants who already know exactly what to do. Maybe we just need a reminder.

I don't know, maybe I am a heretic, I've probably been called worse. But I don't think the reason we read the bible is to take us away or distract us from our daily lives. I don't think the reason we come to worship on Sundays is to have some sort of escape from a world that, let's be honest, some weeks it wouldn't be so bad to have an escape from.

We read scripture, we worship weekly, and we pray our hearts out for the simple reminder – where to look for God, how to see God's action. Call it a miracle, call it mission, but it's work that's being done with the very hands at the ends of your arms. It's work that's being done with the very water that fills your baptismal font. It's work that's done in the bread and the wine that'll sit on this table. And yes, it's work done also with the five dollar bills that get dropped in the offering plate whether they're designated for Haiti relief or not.

“When you reach the bottom of the jar, when things seem to run-out, [*look to cross*] when that *hour has come...* you're in a great position for a miracle.” God seems to say in our story today. “*Fill the jars with water.*” It's as easy as that. Taste and see and believe and then get to work... Feed the hungry. Give the thirsty something to drink. Welcome the stranger. Clothe the naked. Take care of the sick. Visit those in prison. It's not that hard when Jesus tells you to do it. It's stuff you already know how to do.

But then step back. Watch how God moves in the world. Watch how God uses your hands and the hands of those around you to reveal something More. And then, again, taste and see the counter-narrative in, with and under every story. Taste and see and believe the LIVING GOD is good.

So let us pray: Eternal God, our creator and redeemer, as you gladdened the wedding at Cana in Galilee by the presence of your Son, so by his presence now bring your joy to this place and all the world. Amen.