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Miracle at Cana

Only John recounts this story of the miracle of Cana. And in fact some scripture scholars are kind of embarrassed about it being in the Gospel at all. It's a miracle of convenience, they complain. No one is cured from some terrible affliction. No one is raised from the dead. No one's sins are forgiven. No one's faith is tested. No one is saved. All that happens is that someone's life is made a little easier. Is that worth a miracle?

Mary seemed to think so. And so obviously did John. Perhaps because it's a good example of how we can be angels of grace to one another. We may never save someone's life and we can't save anyone else's soul. But, if we look for it, we may find an opportunity to make someone else's life a little easier. Some small thing, something not worth even mentioning to anyone else perhaps, but some small thing that makes all the difference at that moment.

As Paul says there are different gifts but the same Spirit. We are not asked to give what we do not have. But when we do what we can, when we pitch in and participate in God's own creative work, we may find that we can do more than we think. In any case we are rarely the best judge of the importance of what we do. Indeed often what people are most in need of are the simplest things to give--a little time, a little patience, a little care, a little break. A hand offered at the right time can mean more than moving mountains at another. In fact a hand offered at the right time can move mountains.

As Mary, who had likely attended many weddings, I suspect thinks it will. For in Jesus day, a wedding did not so much celebrate the union of two individuals as the union of two families and the wedding celebration was the responsibility not merely of the families involved but of all their friends and neighbors. Families would pull out all the stops. Often enough families would go deep into debt to put on the best celebration possible. And the wedding feast, while the climax, was but the climax of a week long series of celebrations, that also included the women of the bride's family washing, perfuming and dressing the bride, a torchlight procession that evening to the home of the groom, as we see in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins.

For the host families to run out of wine during this week of celebrations would be a social catastrophe that could last as long as their neighbor's memories, which in an oral village culture could easily be a lifetime. It would be a serious disgrace, a loss of honor, a sign that a family was

too poor or, worse yet, too stingy to be hospitable to their guests. And it would be a disgrace not just for the host families but for all these families family and friends as well. For families would rely on extended relatives and friends to help them put on the best feast. For example we know that the wedding at Cana was the work of at least six households. For there are six stone jars for ceremonial washings and most families would only have one. To run out of wine would suggest to everyone present not only that the family was badly off financially, but that they were also badly off socially, they they had few friends and little status.

Nor is it a surprise that Mary is privy to the immanent social catastrophe. For like usually today, wedding banquets would be organized and prepared by the women of the families. For Mary to have inside knowledge means that she is an insider, the wedding one within her extended family or within that of one of her friends. For Jesus to respond by asking what affair it is of his indicates that it is not family but likely a neighbor=s family that is involved. But Mary makes it Jesus= affair, by ignoring his objections and telling the servants that he will take care of things and make it right.

Which he does, and with panache, turning the water into wine, and not any old wine, but the best wine yet to be tasted by the guests, as if the family had been holding back, sandbagging until just as their guests were beginning to think that things were winding down, the family had all along planned to surprise everyone by taking the celebration to a yet higher level of extravagance.

In this episode Jesus proves to be both a dutiful son to his mother and a good friend to relative strangers. The miracle is less the physical act of turning water into wine, but of what this act means, that Jesus is a friend who we can turn to in times of need, a friend we can count on, as Mary did, to come through in times of immanent catastrophe. This is the Aglory@ he reveals and it is in response to this that his disciples begin to believe in him.

The story has also been long interpreted as bearing a second meaning as well, as an allegory of the New Covenant which Jesus establishes. The old wine that has run out has long been seen as a symbol for the Old Covenant. Jesus is the new wine that arrives just in time to bring new life and to take life to a new level of intimacy with God. For wine is the drink of intimacy. We drink it at the Eucharist as a way to realize that intimacy with Jesus.

Last week Jesus was baptized in the waters of the Jordan. Today he transforms water into wine. From the waters of repentance to the wine of celebration. From judgment to joy. John had

preached the coming of God=s day of judgement. Jesus preached the coming of God=s kingdom too. But to what did Jesus compare the kingdom of heaven? To a day of judgment? Yes, but more often than not, he also compared it to a day of celebration. Indeed precisely to a wedding feast. . From water to wine.

Today we carry that same symbolism one step further. Today we turn wine into Christ=s blood and bread into Christ=s body. For Christ brings God close to us by giving of himself to us. Giving of his own flesh and blood.

May we do the same for one another. May our care for one another turn the water of our separate lives into the wine of a compassion, that we might incarnate in our own body and blood, the very body and blood of Christ.