

## ***Seeking Abundance, even with spiritual A.D.D.***

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

January 20, 2019, Baptism of Jesus

Scripture: Jeremiah 33:14-16

by Rev. Dave Le Grand



Take a look at this piece of art. It is entitled “The Wedding Feast at Cana” by Paolo Veronese. A great deal going on here! This is an artist’s depiction of the wedding party. This scene feels like a spiritual version of Where’s Waldo. You have to look carefully to find the main characters In the midst of the chaos.

Having myself been diagnosed as an adult with Attention Deficit Disorder, A.D.D., the chaos of this picture could resemble, well, life for me; perhaps all of us at certain times of our lives. The din of voices and music and interactions could make it very difficult to find the main characters.

We can zoom in on the bride and groom (bottom left), and Jesus in the centre of all the activity – literally glowing, beside his mother Mary.

Theologian David Lose takes us to the heart of John’s story of Jesus at the wedding feast at Cana. Lose says:

Jesus and his disciples are at a wedding and the hosts run out of wine. Inconvenient, we will probably acknowledge, perhaps embarrassing, but is it really such a big deal? **Yes.** Because in this time and place, running out of wine too

early isn't just a social faux pas, it's a disaster. Wine isn't merely a social lubricant, you see, it's a sign of the harvest, of God's abundance, of joy and gladness and hospitality. And so when they run short on wine, they run short on blessing. And that's a tragedy.

Which is when Jesus, prompted by his mother, steps in and provides not just more wine, but more wine than the whole crowd could have drunk not only during the three days of the wedding feast, but probably across three weeks.

In changing the water of those six large basins of water for purification, you see, Jesus is providing close to an additional thousand bottles of additional wine. And not only that, but as the surprised steward discovered, it's not just a cheap bottle of Chianti, but the best wine yet served.<sup>1</sup>

Nestled into the many dynamics that we could notice in this story is the simple fact that this is first story involving Jesus.

We sit with this Gospel story, as one might take in this piece of art by Paolo Veronese. It is the largest piece at the Louvre in Paris, so you have to stand back to appreciate it in its entirety. But then we move in closer to the art in order to appreciate the details.

We do the same thing with John's story of the wedding at Cana and we might notice that power is turned upside down. The hosts of this party didn't even know that they were out of wine, nor did the steward. It is the servants who are the first to behold this miracle of Jesus, transforming water into wine. And again, not just any old wine; the finest wine of the night!

Isn't it interesting that Jesus is so reluctant to perform the miracle. But Mary has complete faith that her son will do something truly extraordinary. She tells the staff to give Jesus what he needs and watch God transform this disaster into grand possibility. How many times in the Bible have disasters been transformed into unimagined possibility? Starting from those Israelites delivered from Egypt. God never far from them, even when God's children lose their moral compass, break their promises to God, but God always gathers the children back.

Of course, Jesus, in John, the most poignant crucifixion story. All seems lost as Mary and disciples watch Jesus die. But we know how that story ends. Two more chapters in the Gospel of John after Jesus' death dedicated to the stories of Jesus appearing to family & friends. In spite of the darkest times you and I might be experiencing, God WILL find a way to deliver abundance.

That seems rich, even a bit cliché, given what we witness daily. What, with gasoline prices skyrocketing in Zimbabwe and people protesting, the government's harsh response was to round up and arrest 600 people. Still violence seems to prevail in Syria, Myanmar, and so many places in our world. Right here, in a nation of plenty, we, like Mary, may sometimes feel like we cajole God, saying, "They have no wine." It would be so easy to just end there. Resign ourselves. But if we follow Jesus, we cannot, we must not give up.

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<sup>1</sup> Blog by David Lose, *In The Meantime*, January 11, 2016. <http://www.davidlose.net/2019/01/epiphany-2-c-what-grace-looks-like/>

A friend of mine was the Executive Director at First United Church deep in the epicentre of the opioid crisis in the downtown east side of Vancouver. My friend gave me a tour of the church building. The sanctuary seemingly ordinary, but now very much a multipurpose space. One example is Bible studies. Chairs are set up on the chancel, at the front, for the Bible study, while many people sleep, hidden from my view on the pews. I was invited to participate in one Bible study session. I mistakenly assumed that all the people in the pews were asleep. They were not, for every so often a disembodied voice would respond to a question asked by the Bible study leader from one of the pews.

Much like St. Andrew's, First United underwent enormous transformation. It determined that its congregation had changed; when the neighbourhood makeup was different, it looked like most congregations. Demographics underwent a cataclysmic change, and First United now serves a congregation comprised completely of the most vulnerable in Vancouver. The staff of ministry personnel with very specialized training, offer a wide array of spiritual and practical outreach ministries.

The Spirit is always moving, agitating, inspiring... blowing. In even the most hopeless circumstances, the message of John's Wedding at Cana story reminds us never to give up. Whether that disaster has hit your life, or you witness it. Don't get distracted by the sensational or absurd things that seem to be happening all around us. Zoom in on where God is doing something new & hopeful.

Maybe the message for us today is: You and I, like Mary, need to learn to cajole, to agitate. I think it begins with persistent, uncompromising prayer; like the parable that Jesus shares in the Gospel of Luke about a Widow who needs justice, she wakes up an apathetic judge in the middle of the night, multiple times, banging on his door, until the judge relents and gives the powerless widow her justice. She is not at all as powerless as we assume. Prayer is like that, our Bible tells us; it is subversive, radical. Never passive, and often it is a catalyst for action. Remember, though, that we are not the ones who bring abundance into this world. It is our Creator who generates abundance. Our job... is to believe it is possible, and to faithfully, expectantly wait, and actively pray our way into new possibility.

One of my favourite Christian thinkers is Canadian Jean Vanier. In 1964, a professor of philosophy and retired naval officer, he was living in France, and observed how persons with intellectual disabilities were rejected and lonely, yet they also offered something wonderful to him, love. He welcomed two men with intellectual challenges into his home. Simple beginnings of a movement that grew, and grew. It grew into L'Arche, a concept where differently-abled people live in community with each other within a profound sense of mutuality – everyone is valued. Today there are 147 L'Arche communities in 37 countries. Vanier puts God's abundance in perspective in his book *Becoming Human*, leaving us today with this thought: ...let us not put our sights too high. We do not have to be saviours of the world! We are simply human beings, enfolded in weakness and hope, called together to change the world, one heart at a time.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Being Human. (page 163) From the CBC "Massey Lecture Series". © 1998, 2008, Jean Vanier & the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation