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John 2:1-11

When You Can’t See Where You Are Going

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John 2:1-11 New Revised Standard Version

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.” Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

We have been talking the last few weeks about when you can’t see where you are going. When you don’t know what is ahead of you, and there aren’t any clues as to which way you should go. We are lost. We forget who we are and whose we are. As we remembered our baptisms last week, we claimed that we are a beloved child of God, precious in God’s sight. I have to remind myself that every single day, and I do it as I am taking a shower. I try to wash away all of my self-doubt and feel the healing power of the water. I am God’s and God never lets me go. You are God’s and God never lets you go.

When you can’t see where you are going, you have to look for reminders of God’s presence and those are rarely where you expect them to be. Signs are important. I have not yet been able to drive to or from DFW airport without discovering that I am on the wrong road because the road signs have changed. Signs are important. I took my dog to the vet this week because she was limping. The vet felt up and down her paw and up and down her shoulders, and at one spot my dog seemed to indicate some pain. So, the vet touches the same spot again but my dog seemed fine. The vet said that she needed the dog to respond twice that there was some discomfort. Once was not enough. Signs are important, and often we need that sign more than once.

Today we heard from the Gospel of John which is nicknamed the Signs Gospel. There are seven significant signs from the life of Christ in the Gospel of John. Seven is a number in the Bible that is supposed to remind us of perfection because of the seven days of creation. The first signs story is at the wedding at Cana. It isn’t a story about healing and it isn’t a sermon. This is the first story about Jesus in John’s Gospel. It is his introduction because no one knows who he is. Jesus is with his mother Mary. In fact, in John’s Gospel, Mary is mentioned twice, in this story and at the cross. That is at the beginning and at the end of his ministry.

Jesus and his disciples are at the wedding too, and when the wine runs out, Mary comes to Jesus and tells him to do something about it. That part of the story seems so weird to me. Jesus says his time hasn’t come yet. My hour has not yet come. You hear a lot in John’s Gospel about Jesus’ hour. It means the time that Jesus will be crucified, buried and eventually resurrected. “The *hour* has come for the Son of Man to be glorified” in John 12:23. “Jesus knew that his *hour* had come to depart from this world and go to the Father” in John 13:1. When Mary tells Jesus there is no more wine and Jesus says, “My hour has not yet come,” he is saying “It’s not time for me to die yet.” Once Jesus sets things in motion, once he begins to show who he is, it will end with his death.

If this is a moment of doubt for Jesus, we know it is not the only time he felt it. In the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus asks God to “let this cup pass from me” in Matthew 26:39 or “remove this cup from me” in Mark 14:36 and Luke 22:42. We see that Jesus is afraid, his betrayal and arrest and crucifixion means suffering and death. That struggle is real and we can totally understand it. The struggle between doubt and trust, between fear and commitment. We recognize that struggle when we know that something is right but we are afraid to do it. We are afraid to show sadness, we are afraid to be vulnerable. We are afraid to challenge the status quo when there are very good reasons to be afraid.

When Jesus is at the Garden of Gethsemane, it is prayer that helps Jesus through his fear and doubt. Here at the wedding in Cana, it seems like serving others helps Jesus through his fear and doubt. Later in John’s Gospel it is after Palm Sunday and Jesus is teaching about his death. Jesus says, “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour” (John 12:27). Jesus knows that when he is afraid, he needs to focus on his purpose. He needs to get busy living life, get busy serving others, get busy doing ministry. It reminds me of Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:34 where he says, “do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.”

When you can’t see where you are going, focus on your purpose. Remember who you are and whose you are and that you have work to do. I want you to think about the difference that you make in the lives of others. It might seem inconsequential when you shared a smile with someone today, but you brightened someone else’s day. A few weeks ago Becky Robinson asked for donations of blankets, jackets, hats, gloves, anything to share with our friends at Emanuel Community Center in the winter. Becky works every Tuesday morning with the Emanuel Community Center in their weekly food pantry, and they are always looking for volunteers if you are available Tuesday mornings. Becky sent me an email this week and she said, “I think I am the only one who can understand the magnitude of the outpouring of donations from the people at Greenland Hills who have shown extreme generosity and loving support.  It is totally amazing. Week after week I have filled grocery carts with all the items mentioned above. As a minor side note, I want to add that we have not had to buy plastic bags for years.  And money saved on bags is money we can spend on food.” Becky was amazed at your willingness as a church family to share with others less fortunate.

Remember who you are and whose you are and that you have work to do. Tomorrow we will honor and celebrate the life of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. After his death, his autobiography was pieced together from articles and talks that he had made. During the Montgomery bus boycott, Dr. King wrote these words, “Almost immediately after the protest started we had begun to receive threatening telephone calls and letters. They increased as time went on. By the middle of January, they had risen to thirty and forty a day. . . . As the weeks passed, I began to see that many of the threats were in earnest. Soon I felt myself faltering and growing in fear. One day, a white friend told me that he had heard from reliable sources that plans were being made to take my life. For the first time I realized that something could happen to me. . . . One night toward the end of January I settled into bed late, after a strenuous day. Coretta [Dr. King’s wife] had already fallen asleep, and just as I was about to doze off the telephone rang. An angry voice said, “Listen, [the person called him the n-word] . . . we’ve taken all we want from you; before next week you’ll be sorry you ever came to Montgomery.” I hung up, but I couldn’t sleep. It seemed that all of my fears had come down on me at once. I had reached the saturation point. I got out of bed and began to walk the floor. I had heard these things before, but for some reason that night it got to me. I turned over and I tried to go to sleep, but I couldn’t sleep. I was frustrated, bewildered, and then I got up. Finally I went to the kitchen and heated a pot of coffee. I was ready to give up. With my cup of coffee sitting untouched before me I tried to think of a way to move out of the picture without appearing a coward. I sat there and thought about a beautiful little daughter who had just been born. I’d come in night after night and see that little gentle smile. I started thinking about a dedicated and loyal wife, who was over there asleep. And she could be taken from me, or I could be taken from her. And I got to the point that I couldn’t take it any longer. I was weak.  Something said to me, “You can’t call on Daddy now, you can’t even call on Mama. You’ve got to call on that something in that person that your Daddy used to tell you about, that power that can make a way out of no way.” With my head in my hands, I bowed over the kitchen table and prayed aloud.  The words I spoke to God that midnight are still vivid in my memory: “Lord, I’m down here trying to do what’s right. I think I’m right. I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right. But Lord, I must confess that I’m weak now, I’m faltering. I’m losing my courage. Now, I am afraid. And I can’t let the people see me like this because if they see me weak and losing my courage, they will begin to get weak. The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I’ve come to the point where I can’t face it alone.” It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying, “Martin Luther, stand up for righteousness. Stand up for justice. Stand up for truth. And lo, I will be with you. Even until the end of the world.” I tell you I’ve seen the lightning flash. I’ve heard the thunder roar. I’ve felt sin breakers dashing trying to conquer my soul. But I heard the voice of Jesus saying still to fight on. He promised never to leave me alone. At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced him before. Almost at once my fears began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything. (Clayborne Carson, The Autobiography of Martin Luther King Jr., pp. 76–78)

When he was afraid, when he wanted to give up, Martin Luther King Jr. remembered that he had a power greater than his own on which he could rely. When Jesus was at that wedding in Cana, I wonder how much time passed from Jesus saying, “My time hasn’t come yet” to Jesus telling the servants,  “Fill the jars with water.” Jesus felt God’s power in him and he remembered his purpose.

When we feel like we don’t know the next step, may we remember this story of abundance. God’s love for us never fails. God’s love for us fills us up and then we have this reservoir of love to draw from. We have six stone water jars filled with thirty gallons of water each. And when Jesus says “draw some out” and try it, we might taste wine instead of water. That will be the most delicious wine, the wine of God’s love, the wine of centered peace and courage. This wine will make us strong because it is filled with the power and the majesty and the miracle of God. When we are called to respond to circumstances with love and act for justice we might not think we are ready. We might think that later will be a better time.  But as Martin Luther King reminded us, “Now is always the right time to do what is right.” Whether we think we are ready or not, now is the time. But we will surely need God’s love and God’s help to get through.

As Dr. King said so eloquently, “darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can do that. And hatred cannot drive out hatred. Only love can do that.” May we find that love of God in our hearts and be filled. And may we turn around and serve the world from a place of abundant joy. Amen.