

Most pastors have a wedding somewhere in their professional lives that they remember as “that wedding.” Some pastors have a memory of a couple that was especially difficult to work with...a bridezilla or a groomzilla...or sometimes a momzilla or dadzilla.

Or maybe one where too much alcohol caused big problems for someone. The opposite of today’s reading.

Others have a memory of a marriage they were pretty sure wasn’t going to last.

I don’t have any really bad memories of the people involved in weddings I’ve done, but some are memorable for other reasons. One was memorable because it was an outdoor wedding and a big black cloud was coming in fast and there was a tornado watch.

This wedding at Cana was going to be memorable one way or the other.

You can almost hear what some of the buzz might sound like...did you hear what happened at that wedding? Did you hear they ran out of wine on like day 3?

In a culture where shame and honor are key concepts, the family would have been shamed forever.

It ended up being “Did you hear about that wedding that had such good wine? They served it towards the end even!”

And now, 2000 plus years later, we are still remembering that wedding for what Jesus did.

On one level, this is just a fun story. This is the scripture reading that Gary and Larissa chose for their wedding. It is about joy and celebration. It’s about a community coming together to celebrate the beginning of something new.

The gist of my wedding sermon was “but it’s not just about the wine.”

I’ll say the same thing today – on one level it is about the joy and the celebration and the wine that was considered an integral part of the celebration.

But it goes far beyond that. Like all the gospels, John’s gospel has stories of miracles. But unlike the other gospels, John’s gospel specifically refers to them as signs.

The miracles...and honestly all the stories in John...go beyond the story itself. They tell us something about Jesus and who he is.

That’s John’s whole point for his book. His mission is to reveal Jesus...and in so doing, to reveal God.

If we want to see God, we look at Jesus. For us as Christians, that's really the main point of all of scripture, but most explicitly of John's gospel...to see Jesus.

What the miracles in John tell us is not primarily that Jesus has the power to work miracles. The miracles themselves in some way point to something about who Jesus is...and therefore who God is.

And they also tell us what God does in the situations we humans find ourselves in.

So what does this sign point to?

Some of the clues come from the prolog to John's gospel.

First and perhaps most obvious, of it's about abundance. This calculates out to about 5000 glasses of wine. That's a lot of wine.

In the prolog, John says that in Jesus we receive grace upon grace...overflowing grace and love and mercy. The overabundance of wine reflects not only that overflowing grace upon grace, but also the abundant life Jesus himself will later promise.

John also tells us in the prolog that Jesus is no less than the word of God...really the heart and soul of God made flesh. That God made flesh is deeply embedded in all of life.

Jesus was born into this world to be intimately involved in the very ordinary things that make up human life...things like weddings.

The story also points to Jesus' humanity in that exchange with his mother. We sometimes think that Jesus knew everything about what was going to happen from the beginning.

But here his response to his mother is like, "wait, what? No, this isn't how it's supposed to start. The timing is all wrong." Somehow though, his mother knew it was time.

When Jesus does act, it is pure grace upon grace. We aren't told why the wine ran out. We don't know if it was poor planning or if more people than expected showed up. But whatever it was, it would have brought great shame on the host. Jesus intervenes to take away that shame and failure.

Ultimately this sign is an image of Jesus' ministry. Just when all seems lost, when Jesus is on the cross, it's like the wine has run out. But then, the best is yet to come. Jesus' resurrection is the best wine, saved for the last.

All of those aspects of this sign point to God's work in our own lives...abundance when we fear scarcity...grace when we experience guilt or shame...God's presence in the ordinary stuff of our own lives...abundant life when all we can see is death.

What I want to look at a little deeper this morning as a connection to our lives right now is the interaction between Jesus and the servants.

I don't know how many of you have watched the series *The Chosen*, but they did a really nice job with this scene.

It really brought to life how puzzled and skeptical the servants would have been by Jesus' command to fill the jugs with water. They did not think that was going to help at all. It seemed ludicrous.

But in the end, they didn't really have any other option, so they did what Jesus told them to. I imagine them thinking "this is just going to make things even worse...not only did the wine run out but they started giving us plain water!"

But of course, that's not what happened. It turns out that following Jesus' instructions, even when they seem ludicrous, brings unexpected blessing.

So, what ludicrous thing is Jesus telling us to do?

What was Jesus' number one commandment? Not rhetorical –

Love...the most apparently ludicrous thing Jesus commanded us to do is to love...to love one another...to love our neighbor as ourselves...to love even the neighbors we're supposed to despise.

That's what makes it ludicrous...like Jesus making 5000 glasses of wine out of water, we are called to love without limit.

This has been on my mind a lot the last couple days. I've written and spoken often against the dehumanization of people...in particular right now in our nation, I've spoken and written against the dehumanization of immigrants for years.

Treating immigrants, whether legal or not, as people created in God's image is what love of neighbor looks like. That kind of love is kind of the whole point of the Good Samaritan story in Luke's gospel.

I believe that we will be judged negatively by history and by God for what we are doing as a nation with immigration enforcement right now.

But I also have to be wary of my own temptation to dehumanize those who work for immigration enforcement. That's where Jesus' commandment can seem ludicrous to me. And I struggle to imagine what love should look like in that scenario.

But ultimately, that command to love one another and love our neighbors as ourselves is the only thing that's going to work to get us out of the situation we are in as a people. Love...however ludicrous it might seem...is what can turn crisis into blessing upon blessing.

That's the conversation we followers of Jesus should be having instead of just falling into the same red-blue blame game everyone else is.

We in the church are like those servants...because they did what Jesus commanded, even though it seemed crazy, a whole community gathered to celebrate was blessed.

When we do what Jesus commanded...when we love anyway, even when it seems impossible, the whole world can be blessed through us.

That's a big ask. But we are showered with grace upon grace...we are gifted with eternal life here and now through our relationship with Jesus Christ. And it's from that deep well of grace and life that we gain our own power to do the unimaginable...to love.