

Isaiah 62:1-5

62:1 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch.

62:2 The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give.

62:3 You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

62:4 You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married.

62:5 For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

John 2:1-11

2:1 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.

2:2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding.

2:3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine."

2:4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."

2:5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

2:6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons.

2:7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

2:8 He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it.

2:9 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

2:10 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."

2:11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Proclamation of the Word

Weddings are accidents just waiting to happen. I bet you can recall a time when something unexpected and potentially awful happened.

When Chuck and I were married at the First Presbyterian Church of York, SC, the air conditioning was trying to keep up with the hot June Saturday afternoon heat. We were packed in like sweaty sardines.

Steve Price was one of the officiants. He was dripping sweat. Some of you were there and remember. As Chuck and I began to make our pledge and say our vows, we hear CRASH! The glass that protected the railing, where the vase of flowers always sat, crashed to the floor. I looked and saw my 5 year old niece, Emily about to burst into tears. Apparently, she had tried to climb up on that railing like a curious child would. She later was an outstanding high jumper on her track team. That was the beginning of her career.

Later that sweltering day at the reception we ran out of punch of all things! Over 500 people overwhelmed the caterers. All our broke college friends and PSA students from Clemson, ate and drank more than anyone predicted. One of the caterers desperately ran to the store for lemonade. I never knew there was a problem until days later.

Weddings are just accidents waiting to happen.

Jesus finds himself in a similar situation at the wedding at Cana. The worst thing that could happen to a host in Jesus' day, was to run out of food, drink marring the host's reputation. There was a crisis at hand in Cana. An abundance of food and drink was a sign of hospitality and blessing. And a wedding was meant to be a huge celebration of blessing with vats of wine to match.

Jesus steps in and performs the first of many signs, according to the gospel of John. There are lots of themes in this passage, but for today, let's focus on two words, Grace and Glory, since this is the year of words. Hope you are paying attention to your Star Word from Epiphany.

First, Grace.

Notice that Jesus replenishes the wine. But Jesus does not just make enough. He provides plenty. There is more than enough. In fact, by filling 6 basin jars which were used in ritual, Jesus makes the equivalent to a thousand, a thousand, bottles of wine. And this was not a cheap Chianti, it was the best quality reminding us that grace is not just sufficient, it is overwhelming, undeserved, abundant. That is how God operates. God is surprising and generous. Perhaps when you do not expect it, you experience that kind of grace. Maybe you like me most often think of grace as forgiveness from sin and pardon. Christ died for our sins for sure to give us new life. But Grace is also blessing, presence, overflowing joy.

If weddings are accidents waiting to happen, maybe they are also the opportunity for new possibilities, a new beginning. Jesus does turn water to wine at a wedding on the third day. Did you catch that? "The third day". Jesus was crucified, died and was raised on the third day- the day of new possibilities. That is what we celebrate on Easter. God's grace happens, resurrection happens. God brings new possibilities even for you and me. Are you looking for new life, hope?

Tom Lane writes in the poem "If Jesus Could" from Imaging the Word volume 1ⁱ which resonates with the longings of many of our hearts.

If Jesus could transform
common water
 into wedding wine
spit and dirt
 into new sight
troubled sea
 into a pathway
well water
 into living water
Could Christ transform
the waters of my life
shallow
murky
polluted
stagnant
sour
 into a shower
 of blessing?

Yes, God is able by grace to transform water to wine, God can transform the waters of our lives into a shower of blessing. Once we have been touched by Grace, we are changed. We become agents of God's grace.

As we remember Martin Luther King on Monday, remember these words he spoke:

"Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make your subject and verb agree to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. A soul generated by love." — **Martin Luther King Jr.**

A heart full of grace compels us to act, to serve, to love.

Story: This week I noticed that a church in town bought t-shirts for the students and teachers of our schools. This was very kind and generous, but for some reason it bothered me. As we say in York, "something about it stuck in my craw." And I realized what it was. The church printed their logo on the shirt, using the public schools and their gift to gain free publicity. I must admit that may be my sin of pride or jealousy at work for which I pray God's grace and forgiveness.

The separation of church and state notwithstanding, I thought about the contrast to how our church reached out to schools. Instead, a small group of faithful servants from Fort Hill Church called the schools and asked how we might assist some kids and their families who might be hungry during the Christmas break. Our school counselors went over and above to contact families and get permission to

share their names with us. Confidentially and quietly, our families worked and served by purchasing staples and groceries, our children made up stockings, then delivered them in love.

One of the best parts of Christmas this year was celebrating that Saturday morning with our church family over a simple, delicious, (and frugal) pancake breakfast. We met that Saturday to learn about our mission and to pray for those who would be touched that day. It was truly what the meaning of Christmas is about to me. People who love God and love one another sharing the love of Christ in real, tangible ways.

Groceries are God's grace made real.

Similarly, Jesus shows us at the wedding in Cana that God's grace is like that-- joyful, generous, serving, hearts full of grace. And it comes through every day signs of food and drink, of shared joy and sorrow, at weddings, classrooms, and hospitals. Celebrating everyday means of God's grace and sharing it. Just as the wine was the best, not the leftover. We give God our best, not our leftovers, leftover time, money, love. That is the Fort Hill way to have hearts full of grace.

That is what the Kingdom of God is like, too. David Steele writes about this kind of celebration that combine food, laughter, music in an atmosphere of welcome, well-being, and love in his article, "Cana Grace." He writes this beatitude:

"Blessed is the pastor whose church has a real tenor (or a bunch) or a plumber. But doubly blessed is the pastor whose congregation knows Cana-Grace."ⁱⁱ

I am blessed to be a part of a church that knows Cana Grace- abundant, joyful grace. We remember how the mother of Jesus swung into action to keep the party going and how Jesus quietly kept the party going.

What do we have so much of that others need?

- I know so many of you are serving in this community on boards, in schools, taking meals on wheels, or through our outreach
- We are blessed with wonderful space, so we share our buildings graciously.
- We have gracious, generous stewards of God's money, talent and time who share it joyfully so that we might have these ministries and facilities.

We have so much that others need.

- Just as you responded so kindly with Christmas groceries, we need to share that grace by serving with Family Promise, giving your time to show hospitality to families who need food and shelter. Ask Linda Gahan how you can help this Spring.

What do we have so much of that others need? Fort Hill is a Cana Grace church.

Which leads to the other word GLORY.

Listen to the verse 11 again,

"Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him."

In that water to wine blessing God's glory was revealed. And ultimately, when God is glorified some will be believe. That is what God desires, for us to know and love him, to have faith.

But glory here is not awe inspiring or flashy. The Steward doesn't even know it is Jesus who made this happen. Did you catch that? He just knows that there is plenty of wine, and it is the best. In sharing our best, not our leftovers, we glorify God. When we give God our best, we are blessed. We don't need to give God our leftovers.

Pansy: I walked through the building with Pansy Duke in tow this week. As she enjoyed the newly renovated building, she commented that the church has always made do with leftovers. We always just got by. She beamed and said, "we are giving God our best." This renovation has been done well. God deserves our best. To God be the glory.

Living in God's abundant Cana grace, let us commit to glorify God by enjoying, yes enjoying, and sharing God's blessings.

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ⁱ Tom Lane, "If Jesus Could" from Imaging the Word volume 1 (United Church Press:1994)

ⁱⁱ Feasting on the Word, David Bartlett and Barbara Brown Taylor, eds. (Louisville: Westminster-John Knox, 2009) p. 262 referencing David Steele, "Cana Grace" in Presbyterian Outlook 174, no. 14 (April 13, 1992):6