

**A Sermon from the Episcopal Parish of  
St. John the Evangelist in Hingham, Massachusetts**  
*Preached by the Rev. Timothy E. Schenck on January 17, 2010 (2 Epiphany, Year C)*

Anyone who has ever been nagged by their mother can relate to this gospel story. “Clean your room, do your homework, get a haircut, get a job, turn water into wine.” It’s all of the same ilk.

We don’t know how Jesus and his mother ended up on the guest list for this wedding in Cana but we do know that the reception was about to take a disastrous turn. Everybody knows the cardinal rule of entertaining is to never, ever run out of wine. But that’s precisely what happens. And it’s what prompts Jesus’ mother to lean over and whisper, “They have no wine.” Now, that’s the worst kind of nag – the implying nag. One that’s passive; one that leaves the implication hanging in the air. “I’d really like to be a grandmother.”

The annoying thing, from a son’s perspective, is that mom is usually right. As a kid I remember fighting with my mother about taking a jacket to see the Orioles play at the old Memorial Stadium in Baltimore. It was the middle of the summer; it was warm outside. I didn’t need a jacket. I also remember sitting in the upper deck during a night game and freezing. Which meant grudgingly admitting that mom was right. Which she usually was. Forget about father; it’s *mother* who knows best.

Of course Mary’s prompting isn’t really about the wine. I doubt the Holy Mother of God really cared whether or not she had another glass of merlot. But Mary had been preparing for this moment her whole life; from the beginning she knew this day would come. It was time for Jesus to begin his public ministry. It was time for him to leave behind the safety of a mother’s nurturing care and move boldly ahead with the work he had been given to do. In her mind, his hour had come.

Mary and Jesus then have an exchange that has long confused scholars. Jesus says, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” Is Jesus being rude to his mother? Is it a foreshadowing of his statement that one must leave father and mother, sister and brother to follow Christ? Is it simply the way mother and son communicated in the ancient world? In any case she doesn’t seem bothered by it and tells the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them to do.

What’s interesting is that while Jesus says “My hour has not yet come” his actions show otherwise. His time had indeed come and he, albeit reluctantly, begins his public ministry at a wedding in Cana. That first miracle reveals the true identity of Jesus: he is the Son of God and the turning of water into wine is more than just a parlor trick. It manifests his divinity for all the world to see.

This past week our prayers and attention have been focused upon a small landmass in the Caribbean. Haiti, already the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere, suffered a devastating

earthquake. A country already in turmoil was thrown into utter chaos and despair. And I admit my first response was “Not Haiti; of all places, not Haiti.” Not a place where the unemployment rate is 80%; not a place where one in two Haitians live on less than \$1 a day; not a place where 1 in 20 are infected with HIV/AIDS; not a place where there is already an inadequate supply of drinking water. Not Haiti.

And in this context the miracle of Jesus turning water into wine seems almost trivial. In Haiti right now, they’d much rather have the water than the wine anyway. It’s hard to have much sympathy for a bridegroom whose poor planning led to this predicament. And if they run out of wine and the party ends prematurely who really cares? In the face of human suffering bringing out the good stuff seems trifling.

But only at first glance. Because this miracle matters. The Wedding at Cana shows that God is responsive to people’s needs. Not always in the ways we would for hope or expect; sometimes in ways we cannot even perceive. But it starts with a need that demands Christ’s presence. The people of Haiti are in dire need right now. So I bid you to keep them in your prayers. To pray that they know and feel the presence of the God of all comfort; to pray that their eyes will be opened to God’s responsiveness; and to pray for healing and wholeness in the midst of suffering.

It seems somehow appropriate that this morning we also hear the prophet Isaiah voicing God’s concern for the city of Jerusalem. God promises to rebuild the city and restore the exiled Chosen People. When Nebuchadnezzar and his armies drove the Jews into exile they had decimated the city. They had destroyed the Temple and left the city in ruins. Yet the prophet sounds a note of hope in the midst of despair; he proclaims justice in the midst of oppression. As their homes and churches and hospitals and businesses lie in rubble, I’m certain the Haitians can relate to this passage. And this morning we could easily hear the start of the passage this way: “For Haiti’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Port au Prince’s sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch.” It will be a long road ahead but hope must abide and the hour has come for us to partner with God to help restore this devastated nation.

In the same way, Mary was right; *Jesus’* hour had come. At least to begin his ministry. Jesus’ true hour, of course, had not yet come. This would be his death, resurrection, and ascension – what we call the Paschal Mystery. So both Mary and Jesus are correct about the hour – they simply interpret it from differing perspectives; Mary from a human one and Jesus from a divine one.

And these two perspectives undergird the whole story of the Wedding at Cana. This is about a miracle at an earthly wedding banquet; but the full miracle won’t take place until the heavenly wedding banquet, the Scriptural metaphor for the kingdom of heaven. At the heavenly banquet Christ himself is the bridegroom. He throws open the doors and extends hospitality to everyone; it is a banquet of abundance where the wine never runs out; where the music never stops; where

the food never stops arriving. And this Wedding at Cana gives us a glimpse of what is to come; a foretaste of the heavenly banquet.

So this miracle isn't about the wine. It's about the manifestation of God's glory in the world shining through Jesus Christ. That's why it stands as a beacon of hope to the people of Haiti and to each one of us. Christ is equally present whether we're in the midst of joy or adversity. May God deal graciously with all of those in great need both in Haiti and throughout the world.