

Today we again read of the miracle of Jesus at the wedding in Cana. The consumption of the wine at this event was higher than what had been planned, (they must have been Anglican). Mary, presumably in order to prevent embarrassment to the hosting family, approached Jesus and casually mentioned, "They have no wine." To this Jesus replies, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." Mary does what any self-respecting Hebrew mother of the first century A.D. would have done. She ignores her son and tells the servants, "Do whatever He tells you to do." She speaks as if she knows all will be well. She knows that Jesus, who was that miraculous baby boy she bore some thirty years before and who is now a man in His prime of life, has this handled.

It seems that in this interaction, there is something more going on than is immediately obvious. We've noted before that Christ's response seems harsh. Some of this is semantics for the Aramaic term "Woman" doesn't carry the same disrespectful tone that it typically does in English. Regardless, Christ tells Mary, "Mine hour is not yet come." It seems that Christ isn't ready to reveal Himself more broadly as the Messiah quite yet.

We might have a tendency to think that Mary forced Christ into action, but Jesus is not one to be forced. He understood all the relational dynamics of the people in attendance so we know that He wasn't caught off-guard by this. He is God. He knows everything. All hearts are laid bare before Him. He understood all the sub-text of all the interactions of the people there and potential for embarrassment to the hosts. If Christ had larger purposes in mind so that doing this miracle would have undermined those purposes, then nothing Mary would have said could have coerced Him to change the water into wine.

But there is something else happening here. What we tend to overlook is that Mary and Jesus had a relationship. They weren't just acquaintances. They weren't just friends. They were mother and son. They knew each other. They were God and creature, though who knows what exactly Mary truly understood about her Son? I'm sure they had many, many, theological discussions over the years. I'm sure Jesus had handled other sticky or troublesome situations that Mary witnessed throughout her life. Mary knew that He could

handle the situation in a graceful way that would probably turn out even better than if the wine never ran out. She knew that Jesus could meet the need because she knew Jesus. And Jesus did not disappoint. He exceeded all expectations.

The gospel ends, “This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on him.” Christ had, of course, previously caught the attention of the disciples for they were already following Him as the Messiah, although at this time, they didn’t really know Jesus like Mary did. They didn’t know with whom they were dealing, so “this beginning of miracles” that “manifested forth his glory” expanded their ideas about Jesus. They knew Him, but they didn’t have the experience with Him to understand that He is the answer to all of the problems. They would learn that more and more, but they weren’t there yet.

What are we to make of this today? First, let us realize that relationship means that we can go to Jesus with our problems, and He will answer our prayers. He will help us in our need. Of course, as a preacher, I immediately want to hedge a little here and say things like, “He always answers, but not necessarily right away,” or “He answers, but sometimes the answer is no,” or “He answers, but not in the way that you might think is best.” All of these may be true, but I think that collectively they tend to lower our expectations of God. They tend to make us disbelieve that God is there and that He cares for us.

Right now, however, let’s just drop the hedging. Maybe we are all a little too much like the disciples. Yes, we follow Jesus, but our expectations are pretty low. We will pray about things and situations, but in our hearts, we still underestimate Jesus. We perhaps close up our hearts because we don’t want to be disappointed with the answer He provides.

What if we were more like Mary? “Jesus, here is a problem. It is beyond my ability to handle. But I know you. I know you love me. I know You can handle this so I am just going to give it to You to take care of.” Perhaps there is simply more of an openness of our souls in such an approach.

Let’s think about this further. First, everything begins with Christ. He has brought us

near to God in Himself. He has healed us and made us family. He has established that relationship with us which is the basis for everything. These are doctrinal facts revealed to us in Christ through the Church and through Scripture. We know these things. But yet do we really know Jesus. Are we more like Mary or like the disciples?

The challenge for us is to let down our guard with God. We need to stop hedging and to start receiving the grace that He has for us each day. The problems don't magically go away, but let us not believe that the miracle worked is any less. We have a relationship with God! Perhaps we've heard that so many times that we have become blunted to this miracle. When we pray, God who created everything, God against whom we rebelled, God who became incarnate, suffered, died, rose, and ascended to restore us to Him, hears us.

It seems like the problems become secondary in view of the primary fact that when we call upon the Name of the Lord, He hears us, He answers us with Himself. He is sufficient for us. Let us turn briefly to Today's psalm which is a beautiful reflection upon our intimacy with God. He is our God, and we are His people. The Church is the bride of Christ. He is married to us and thus loves us and cares for us as a loving husband cares for his wife. And we must learn to long for Him in return.

The beginning of that psalm reads:

O GOD, thou art my God; \* early will I seek thee.

2 My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh also longeth after thee, \*

in a barren and dry land where no water is.

3 Thus have I looked for thee in the sanctuary, \*

that I might behold thy power and glory.

4 For thy loving-kindness is better than the life itself: \*

my lips shall praise thee.

5 As long as I live will I magnify thee in this manner, \*

and lift up my hands in thy Name.

Now this psalm is ostensibly written by David when he was pursued into the Judean

Wilderness, probably by his rebellious son, Absalom. King David and his companions were threatened by the harsh and dry wilderness on one hand and by the traitors on the other.

This was a situation where life and death hung in the balance.

Notice first that David calls upon his God. He draws upon his intimate relationship with God. David has pledged himself to God, and God has covenanted with David as well in an unbreakable bond. Notice too that David calls to God out of the midst of his troubles. His focus is not primarily that his enemies would be vanquished, but rather that He would experience again the intimacy of worship with God, prioritizing this even before his life. “For thy loving-kindness is better than the life itself: \* my lips shall praise thee.” David prays to know and feel the loving-kindness, the *hessed*, of God. This is the answer to his distress, that his thirst for God would be quenched.

With such a disposition, the actual distress he is suffering isn't the main issue. Rather his main struggle is to know that God is with him in that moment. This is instructive for us. We want to focus upon the problem. We need this or that. We suffer in so many ways, and we think that the solution is for God to remove the suffering. Yet the real solution is to know God more deeply and more intimately, in the midst of our suffering. God Himself, is the answer for us, not God as the supplier of the solution that mitigates our distress.

Now again, don't get me wrong here. God will bring us through our trials so when He provides deliverance, let us be quick to give all praise to God! However, the main point here is that our relationship with God is the thing. If we have that intimacy with Him, then we will face the difficulties with courage. If God is with us, who can be against us? Even when the outcome of our struggle is death – and let us be honest here, that this has been and is the end result for many, many, of our brothers and sisters in the faith, and also that if the Lord tarries, we will all face this battle one day – the thing that matters is that we belong to God, and He belongs to us. This life is preparatory to our eternal life. This is not our home. God is our Home!

It is this confidence in our relationship to God, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit's

abiding presence in our lives that we are able to open our hearts to Him through any difficulty. When He is our God, when we have developed that intimacy with Him, then we are relieved of the responsibility of the final results of our efforts. We do impact many things by our thoughts, words, and actions, and should thus exercise our agency with care and wisdom. But the final results of most things are beyond our control. Can you bring the rain? Can you stop the rain? Can you orchestrate the future? Can you impose your will upon someone else, even if it is for their own good? No. No you can't. God doesn't even coerce us to obey, so what makes us think that we could do this? So we must stop fretting about those things that we cannot control. That is God's part. He will take care of all troubles as is most expedient for us. God has this handled.

Fear not, for I *am* with you; Be not dismayed, for I *am* your God.

I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you,

I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.'

Such is the confidence that we see with the Blessed Virgin Mary. We see her bringing the situation to Jesus. She tells the servants, she tells us, "Listen to my Son. Listen to my God. He has this handled." This is the admonition we see from St. Paul. "Do not return evil for evil." Why? Because God sees our distress. He sees how we have been misused or abused. Give that pain to Him. He has it handled.

If there is one thing you should take away today, it is that our relationship with Jesus, with God, is the most important thing. All else will come together if we could only understand this. Be open to Him. Pause and listen to Him. In your minds and hearts, know that He gave His life for you. Know that He has brought you into His glorious kingdom. Know that He loves you with an everlasting and unshakable love. And then rest in Him. Let your soul thirst for God, knowing that that thirst will be satisfied. In that confidence, now let our thirst be quenched and our hunger sated around our Lord's table.

2025-01-26

The Third Sunday after Epiphany

K. Bartel, 6

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. AMEN.