

Whenever I imagine the wedding at Cana,
I picture it in the style of one of those mid-century
movies about ancient times.

You know the ascetic:

Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*,
Ben Hur,
Cleopatra.

My imagined movie scene opens on a lavish wedding
with guests sprawled drunkenly everywhere,
people dancing too close,
and a fountain of wine at the center.

Because, to the ancient people at a wedding,
or at least at this wedding in Cana,
the fountain of wine
would have been the fountain of life for the party:
the source of the conviviality,
the spring of merriment
that flows and flows and flows as the wedding
goes on and on and on.

Into this Bacchus gathering
rolls Jesus and his pals, the disciples.
The Gospel writer John is careful to note
that they “had *also* been invited to the wedding”
perhaps because it’s an oddity that
this ragtag team of a rabbi and his religious posse
would have been invited to such a raucous occasion.

Well, Jesus and the disciples had been invited.
And the wine has now run dry.
Another guest, Jesus’ mother, notices when the wine gives out
and says to Jesus, “They have no wine!”
The fount of fun is out!
The wellspring of wedding revelry runs no more;
the party’s fountain of life has ceased to flow.

Jesus, it seems, couldn’t care less about *this* fountain of fun.

“What concern is this to you and me?” he replies.
 “This isn’t my time. Don’t push me.” (The Message, John 2:4)
 Jesus, it seems, has another kind of font in mind,
 is contemplating another flowing source of revival.
 Jesus has his sights set on a different fountain of life:
 six stone water jars,
 standing there,
 each holding twenty or thirty gallons
 for the Jewish rites of purification.

They would have been BIG jars. *Heavy* jars.
 Any they wouldn’t have been located
 right in the part of the house where you'd also keep the wine.
 But Jesus would have known where they were;
 he would have, after all, used that water for his own religious rite of
 purification.

So, he remembers them, and their heft and volume.
 Jesus says to the servants, "Fill the jars with water."
 and they do fill them. Really full. Up to the brim.
 And when they draw the liquid out again, it is wine.
 This water meant for religious purposes
 has now become the life of the party:
 overlooked water meant for an exclusive religious purity rite
 is now a new and renewed fountain of fun
 for everyone.

When Jesus performs a miracle at that wedding,
 it doesn’t only have to do with water and wine.
 It also has to do with overcoming exclusion
 by sharing abundance.

To most guests, the wedding’s time of open conviviality
 would seem opposed to the forgotten jars of water for the purification rite,
 which are still full from being so little used.
 Nobody's thinking about Holy Time
 when they're dipping deep into the wine that night.
 And it seems like Jesus doesn't belong at the center of the party either;

as the Holy Man, he belongs more appropriately with the water jugs,
forgotten in the corner.

And one might think that Jesus, as the resident Religious Person,
might be in the business of EXCLUSION.

But Jesus sees no division and no incongruence here,
and he's actually in the business of ABUNDANCE.

Without any fanfare,
with hardly any notice by the party guests,
working within sight of the lowly servants, the anxious steward, and his
disciples,
Jesus marries the purity of the water's intended purpose
with the party's brimming joy and merriment.

And when Jesus changes water with a designated purpose
into an undesignated, shared recourse,
the result is ABUNDANT.

Just, filthy abundant!

One hundred and eighty gallons worth of *abundant*.

Nine hundred and eight wine-bottles worth of *abundant*.

It's an abundance that blows off the doors
and is more than anyone could expect,
like twelve basket-fulls of leftovers abundant.

From this new fountain comes so much,
the best much,
the good much.

Jesus takes what only a few guests would have noticed
or remembered
or even used
and with it brings about an overwhelming source for joy
for everyone.

He takes something with an exclusive purpose—
purifying water intended for religious folks only—
and turns it into something in which *everyone* can share.

No wonder this miracle takes place at a large gathering,
a public affair,

in the presence of many and all kinds of people.
 No wonder it takes place at a wedding:
 an occasion celebrating a new relationship
 and the coming together of two different people.
 Because when Jesus uses water *meant* for religious people only
 and reassigns it for the lives of everybody present—religious and otherwise—
 we see what God’s abundance leads to.
 God’s abundance leads to outsiders being included in the community;
 God’s abundance leads to people being saved from embarrassment and
 shame,
 like the newlyweds would have felt if faced with nothing to serve guests.

Yes, throughout the Gospel of John,
 Jesus’ miracles make clear how God’s abundance
 leads to people’s condemnation being erased, as with the man born blind,
 to people’s paralyzing conditions being overcome,
 as with the person sick for thirty-eight years.
 It leads even to the dead being raised, as with Lazarus.

The miracles of Jesus that work abundance,
 demonstrate the truth that God will go to any lengths
 and use anything
 to show us abundant love.
 God can indeed use any *thing*,
 even something earmarked for some other purpose,
 to demonstrate God’s abundant love and care for US.
 And for, as John 3:16 puts it, the WHOLE WORLD.

Because in none of these instances,
 and, in fact, in none of the miracles in John’s Gospel,
 does Jesus ever work God’s abundance
 alone, by himself or in private.
 (Remember, that the miracle at Cana
 happens within
 a very public gathering.)
 Which means that God’s abundant love given to and for us
 is not only yours or only mine.
 It is not something we hoard or keep.

Like the party's wine,
God's abundant love and other God-given abundance
is meant to be shared.
Experiencing God's abundance and abundant love
is meant to help us see the extravagant love God has for others;
to help us see the abundance that we can share
or the abundance that our neighbors unjustly lack.

The Good News today is that
God can use water intended for purity to help include everyone in the party.
God can take situations of shame or condemnation
and turn them into sites of love, mercy, and generosity.
God can use harsh conditions or times of suffering
to reveal God's unwavering presence and commitment,
and God can even use death to work new life.

The Challenge today is to live like that.
That when the fountain in the Cecil DeMille-esque Wedding at Cana scene
flows again,
to not continue drunkenly oblivious to the transformation,
but to let the abundance of God
and the abundant love of God
change the course of our merriment,
alter our revelry,
and transform our lives and world
entirely.

AMEN.