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Grace Episcopal Church, Alexandria Virginia
Gospel of John 2:1-11

If you Google epic wedding disasters you will see a lot of nightmarish stuff. The power cuts out and everyone is in the dark. The limo gets lost and so the wedding party is missing. Or, the classic, the towering wedding cake is being paraded into the hall, and with one misstep, the cake ends up sideways on the floor. Maybe you have your own story.

It's one thing to watch the scenes unfold on YouTube and another to be there in person. Your instinct would be to try to help. You might run to check the breaker panel or send GPS coordinates to someone you know in the limo. I don't know what you would do with that cake, but the point is that you would try to do something because that's what people do. That's what friends do. Since we are made in God's image, it is no surprise when he hear of God doing just this in our Gospel today.

Today if a party ran out of food and drink, it would simply mean it was time to go home. But it was different in Jesus's time. The wedding celebration was in the groom's home, it was a whole village affair and it lasted a week! It's like having an Open House that just won't end. To me, that sounds nightmarish in itself. Villagers adored their traditions but few could afford hospitality for such a number over such a period of time. So the source I read said that whenever there was a wedding, the groom's group of same-age friends were responsible for stocking up for the party. That's why there were 6 jars of water in the home and not just one. With all the contributions in place, they thought they were ready. But as the party pulled in so many people from the village and surroundings, the wine runs out. This is horribly disgraceful because it means that the groom's friends messed up, or worse, maybe the groom doesn't actually have any friends. So like a good friend, Jesus steps in and fixes the problem before people start to gossip. The joy and dancing continues. End of story? Hardly.

There is much more than compassionate friendship happening here. John places this story as the first scene in Jesus's public ministry because this miracle is a sign that points to what is true in heaven. Jesus didn't just meet the need. He didn't just get the power back on, get the limo on the right road, or scoop up the cake. In this sign, Jesus created the equivalent of about 1000 bottles of the best wine they had ever tasted. Jesus started his public ministry by making more wine than any wedding party could ever drink. What does that point to? What is Jesus revealing?

Karoline Lewis is a theologian who points out that the word "grace" is used four times in the chapter 1 prologue of the Gospel of John, but then never again. There is no need to say the word again because, for the rest of the Gospel, grace is embodied in Jesus. In his first sign, Jesus reveals himself, God's grace, through the overabundance of good wine, in an everyday home, at a common celebration. He reveals God who loves to hear the laughter of his children. He reveals God who saves the best for last so that the dancing can continue. He reveals God who liberates us from the fear of life and of death. In all of that, he also reveals himself as a friend.

This is such great news throughout the ages, but what about the people today who aren't laughing and celebrating? How do we reconcile God's abundant grace with ongoing suffering? What about the people coping with shortages in their everyday lives? What about the friendless? What does this story have for them?

I believe the answer is everything for this is a story of abundance that came about through noticing and nudging.

Now in my position with you all here at Grace and La Gracia, I notice a lot. During this omicron surge, in particular, I have witnessed how this variant affects families differently depending on their socioeconomic status. For most, the illness is not severe. For some, the toughest part is the boredom of staying in quarantine. For others, the toughest part is the nightmarish terror of staying in quarantine and not being able to work and pay bills and buy food and medicine.

As humans, it's easy for us to look away and not notice, even if we are pretending not to see. Mary cared about the wedding family and when she noticed a problem, she nudged her son to do something about it. Jesus responded as a friend and, in doing so, also revealed God's plan of new, abundant, joy-filled life for us all. In that village, all were fed that week.

In our village of Alexandria, Arlandria and Chirilagua, things are okay and not so okay. Not everyone is coming to the party. I wonder if the remedy can be as simple as it was at Cana: to notice and to nudge. To notice the needs of your neighbor and to respond as a friend who is made in the image of God. Respond by nudging Jesus in prayer asking for compassion and generosity for your neighbor. Respond by nudging other people too, for remember that Jesus didn't do this miracle alone. Mary nudged the servants to do whatever Jesus tells them. Be ready for a similar nudge.

Friendship, inspired and fueled by the love of our Lord, may be just how grace continues to break in to our village. When that happens, you will know, for there will come a new quality that will feel like water slowly, or suddenly, turning into delicious wine. This is how it always is with Jesus.

Tomorrow we honor and celebrate the life of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. A leading crusader for the poor, he once said that "As long as there is poverty in this world, no man can be totally rich even if he has a billion dollars." The first sign in John's Gospel teaches us that God brings us new, abundant life with the best wine at the end where the dancing will go on and on. We are called to be the best of friends to all and make sure that God's dance hall is filled. Following the words of Dr. King, only then can we totally dance.