Second Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle C

St. Mary’s in Riverside

This morning

one of the most familiar stories in the NT

most often thought of as a wedding story

which might suggest that it’s a bit out of place

on this Second Sunday in ordinary time

when on this Martin Luther King Weekend

we might have thought the Lectionary

would have given us beatitudes

or Jesus taking on the Pharisees

or his reaching out to a Syro-phoenician woman or

Samaritan or someone else

Similarly marginalized by society

But no ... we get a wedding feast ...

Puzzling because ever Advent we start anew with a Gospel

this year cycle C = Luke

but today’s gospel isn’t from Luke but from John

a further indication that maybe things aren’t what they seem

maybe not just a wedding story or miracle story

or Marian injunction to “do whatever he tells you”

To put this context, this week resume Ordinary time

Christmas season officially ending last week

Yet since advent, every Sunday has focused on some revelation

Manifestations in the Baptist and the visitation

Then nativity, Shepherds, holy family

Jesus the tween in the temple

Magi, and last week baptism of Lord

Even though the manifestation cycle is technically over

The epiphanies continue ... now in first miracle

but what is being revealed?

just power to change water into wine?

or something else

Many years ago was introduced to an extended reflection on the story

by poet - preacher - friend Tom Troeger

a reflection on what happened **after** the wedding

Tom begins by suggesting that was a lot of wine left over

Gospel says that there were six stone water jars

each holding fifteen to twenty-five gallons

about 120 gallons of wine

600 bottles

lot to drink, especially since initial supply already consumed

He writes: *I would like to think that when the couple had left for their honeymoon and guests had departed, some friend bottled the remaining wine, and when the couple returned, presented them with several crates of it.*

He continues: *I picture the couple delighted, smiling to think that on the meager budget of newlyweds they can enjoy such a heavenly vintage with their low-cost suppers. In the way of eager young couples, they do not plan very well at first so that at the end of two or three years, they realize, extravagant as Jesus was, they will some day run out. So they begin to save the wine for special occasions: anniversaries, on the birth and dedication of a child, at family reunions, and on high holy days.  
  
 every time they taste the wine, they relive their wedding day, and recall how at the first sip of Jesus’ wine they had looked at each other with eyes that shone with a love whose intensity still catches them by surprise.  
  
 The years pass until they are an old couple. Troeger pictures the old couple on a chilly night. She is in front of the fire, trying to warm her always cold feet and hands.  
  
 He pauses coming into the room and studies her in the light of the fire: the shape of her forehead, the deep creases of her face, and the lips he has kissed ten thousand times.  
  
 With a prompting he cannot explain, he suggests, “Honey, what if we finish the Rabbi’s wine tonight. There’s just one little bottle left. It might warm you up some.”  
  
 She smiles and nods, so he fetches the final bottle and brings it back to the fire with the only clean cup he can find. As he uncorks it he wonders aloud if it will still be good, after all these years. She comments, “The rabbi’s wine has never gone bad, It’s as amazing as the way he provided it.”  
  
 He pours the first serving and hands his wife the cup. She sips and hands it back. They look at each other and nod their agreement: as rich as the day they were married.  
  
 They drink very slowly, and as they drink they start to tell stories.  
She says: “I remember when Sarah was born. You would have thought nobody had ever been a father before, the way you carried on. You and the neighbors consumed an entire crate of wine that night.”*

*“Well you did just about the same, when Benjamin and Rebecca brought home our first grandchild,” he said. She laughs heartily, “Those were such good times, good enough to want them never to stop.”  
  
 He pours some more wine, and as they each take a sip she notices he is trying to hold back tears. She knows what he is thinking: remembering when the third child died. Terribly sick. Tried everything. But Micah died anyway. All she could pray for weeks on end was “My God, my God, why have you forsaken us?” Weeks later he came home to supper, and they set the table without saying a word, going through the motions that had become rituals of habit, the only thing holding them together day by day now. When they sat down they realized she had no water from the well and he brought no wine from market. So he got up and found one of the bottles of wine from their wedding. Might as well open it now. No sense saving it for special occasions anymore. So he opened it and when the wine touched their lips they tasted grace in their hearts, and they broke down and sobbed together. The grief of their loss never went away – how could it? – but the strength to carry the grief together that was what the wine of Jesus gave them.  
  
 Now sitting in front of the fire, they look at each other, and she takes his hand saying “Yes, Honey, I know, I know.” He is silent, then holds the bottle upside down over the chalice. There are a few last drops.  
  
 He hands the chalice to her: “Here, you finish it.”  
  
 She takes the smallest sip and hands it back to him, pointing out there is still the tiniest bit at the bottom. He puts the brim to his lips and throws back his head holding the cup straight over him, then slowly brings it down and holds it between them.   
  
 “That’s it,” he says with a voice that sounds both satisfied and sad. “All gone. None to pass on to the children or the grandchildren now. Just the story of our wedding at Cana, and the rabbi who blessed us with wine. Just the story. But no wine.”  
  
 “Not to worry” responds his wife. “Not to worry. As long as people come to his table, there will always be more.”*

What profoundly touches me about this reflection

Is that throughout the story

in the process of consuming the wine

again and again the couple becomes disciples of the wine

telling the story in all of its intoxication and pain

and so the manifestation continues

and the manifestation is unmasked

that the change from water to wine

is not just a miracle of hospitality or graciousness

but also a miracle of commitment ... even when the cup is empty

and the cupboard run dry

for this early story in John

this first miracle at Cana

foreshadows the miracle of Golgotha

changing water to wine

is symbolic of the changing of hearts

culminating in the pouring out of God’s own wine

in the blood of his Son

who when hanging on the cross

eternal wine and water

flowed form his side

and the church was born

Some of us might feel as though

We are still in the first blush of the wedding feast

With stores of wine and grace

That will last forever

Although it won’t

And some may feel that the cup is already empty

The vat of wine or grace or love run dry

In the shadow of the Martin Luther King holiday

I wonder if this civil rights martyr would think

That in this age ... in this country

The good wine is gone?

The storehouse of intoxicating rhetoric

And the spilling of his own blood ...

Moving us no further ... than where

That Thursday evening in April of 1968

Yet this feast of manifestation

Is a an invitation to hope

For the prophet tells us in the first reading

that we shall not be called forsaken

Or our land desolate

But instead called Gods’ delight, the Espoused of Christ

But only if we are willing

To drink of the cup

An New Testament metaphor for pouring ourselves out in service

To those whose personal, spiritual, emotional, physical

Vats have gone dry

And cupboards are bare

In his book *God in the Dock,* C.S. Lewis wrote:

[keyboard, “We Shall Overcome”]

“*God creates the vine and teaches it to draw up water by its roots and, with the aid of the sun, to turn that water into a juice which will ferment and take on certain qualities. Thus every year, from Noah’s time till ours, God turns water into wine*.”

In a similar way

That baptismal font that graced us with living waters

also a kind of spiritual wine vat, chalice of blessing and suffering

The Gethsemane cup - writ large

That Jesus would not by pass

But drink deeply

And then hand it on to us - his espoused, his beloved

And so water and wine, central to our eucharist celebration

Is embodied in the sweat and blood of the baptized

Who take up the mission of the rabbi

To become disciples of the wine

For it is only in drinking deeply

Of the cup of suffering and commitment

In view of so much blood

Spilled on the streets of this city

And around the globe

That we too, guided by the spirit of dignity and justice,

We too will overcome someday. Through Christ our Lord