

**John 2:1-11**  
**Dare to expect more**

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**Story**

It's delightful that the week after my daughter's marriage, we have this wonderful Gospel reading of the Wedding at Cana. It was also a reading at the wedding. There's such a richness and depth of joy and enjoyment that permeates through this reading, just like the way my daughter and son-in-law glowed at the wedding itself. And afterwards, at the reception, they just kept glowing. Very contagious. There's something about weddings, isn't there, that brings out a fullness of being from our depths?

**The Cup Running Over**

Think for a moment about those times of overflowing joy and superabundant fullness in your own lives – those moments or periods where you felt that indeed your cup was filled to the brim and running over. For many of us, we hold those moments as gift, together with a humble awe and a faint edge of believing that this won't last; that it's luck, that we don't deserve it. As we move on in life, our life experience tells us that there are highs and lows; and these are not always something we have control over. We treasure the joys while they last, but sometimes, we don't dare to expect more. The moments of abundance seem unreal.

We hear the words in Scripture.. God loves us, God wants to give us all good things. We know Jesus' words: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly". And there are the stories of gracious and extravagant generosity and miracles – like in today's Gospel: gallons and gallons of water turned into the best wine – far in excess of any need – a sign that God's glory was being revealed – that God was indeed present in Jesus Christ.

**The Tension: Struggle and Abundance**

It's part of our natural human experience to feel that the whole idea of this overflowing abundant generosity of God towards us can seem out of reach. I, too, hold this tension - on the one hand, deep within 'knowing and experiencing the breadth and length and height and depth of God, filled with all his fullness', (as Paul describes it in his letter to the Ephesians). And on the other hand, at the same time even, living with the struggles and pain that life brings. Caught up in the difficult here and now, there are times when the temptation is to pay mere lip service to any notion of the lavishness of God, and assign it to the realms of theory or theology; and just nod to it from a distance. It's something many of us do- we tell ourselves "That's how it will be in heaven, or at the end times, or momentarily in this life at special times.- it's a promise of something to come...of something sometime else when God is supposed to make these things happen, but not now. Now's when I'm struggling. Now are the ups and downs."

Yet there it still is, in those deep places within; a knowing that there is something larger at work than any here and now woes – something larger and more encompassing and real, and overflowing in goodness. How wonderful that is, and how possible. But how elusive it can be.

And so we can hold this tension; this funny sort of disconnect between our everyday life and this promise of abundance and fullness of life. Think for a moment about how you experience this. Perhaps a strong, abiding sense of God's richness in your life; perhaps glimpses and snatches of it here and there, with a longing for this to well up from the depths, and spill over everything in our lives. Or perhaps there's very little connection with this at all – God's abundance, even a whiff of his provisions, has passed you by. Our self-talk tells us that it's not possible, that sort of thing doesn't really happen. We don't deserve it, anyway.

Is this all just a notion? That life abundant is simply not something that you and I – all of us- can expect as part of the reality of our lives?

### **The Gospel**

Let's see how today's Gospel might speak to this.

As is always the case with John's Gospel, there are layers and layers of meaning contained within each story. But I'm not going to try to deal with all the points or all the rich symbolism that this wonderful story gives us... I'm catching just one point – this unwarranted extravagance and generosity of God.

At an insignificant wedding party in a little unimportant village in the outlying Galilean countryside, Jesus changes six large vessels of water into wine – each jar with a capacity of 20-30 gallons,

Now translate this into bottles of wine – about 900 bottles. But let's not get literalist about this – all the miracles in this Gospel come in exaggerated, out-of-the-ordinary quantities – designed to grab our attention and reveal something to us about God. And here we have God giving in abundance; over the top, more than we can possibly need or even think of asking for.

To drive the point further home –this seems quite an unnecessary sort of miracle to take prominence as the first of Jesus' signs that John records. There isn't nearly the same sort of need as feeding 5,000 hungry followers, or healing a blind man or raising the dead. And the wedding party's already been in process long enough –probably for several days - for the steward to make inference about the guests being drunk. Apart from the possibility of some face-saving over the wine running out, there's no need evident here for these guests to receive such copious amounts of first class quality wine. They're drunk! They'll get even drunker! They wouldn't even taste the

difference. This gift of vast quantities of the very best of wine is unwarranted, undeserved, and unnecessary by any of our standards.

### **Seeing God**

But that's not the point. Whether they're drunk or sober, whether they deserve or need this wine, is irrelevant. This sign, this miracle in all its overwhelming proportions, is there to point us to something beyond itself: to point us to whom God is, to whom Jesus is. *What is going on here, is that in the abundance and generosity of Jesus' gift of new wine, we catch a glimpse of the identity and character of God. And very simply – it is the character of God to give unconditionally and generously. And our God takes delight in our enjoyment of life.*

The Gospel writer John wants us to think in *big –extravagant -* terms about Jesus. Remember that John has just – in the previous chapter - introduced Jesus to us in *big – abundant-* terms: as the Word made flesh – as the glory of the fullness of God come to us in human form in Jesus. Divinity meeting with humanity. That's overwhelming and mind-blowing. Big! The whole fullness, abundance, magnificence of God giving himself to humankind in Christ Jesus. And further on in Jesus' story, there's more of this grace of self-giving as he gives his life for us.

### **Realities**

Where does this leave us? There is a base-line reality of our Christian faith that the whole fullness of God's presence is with us – in the world and in our lives – in us. The whole of the divine – God the Holy Spirit- is with us, without measure, without limit. This is regardless of how we might feel, and regardless of whatever we might think about what we need or deserve. God has given himself to us in Jesus Christ. It's done. Experiencing or being filled with the abundance of God isn't a subjective, or circumstantial, or emotion-driven thing, however absolutely wonderful that is when we do feel that overflowing joy – God in all his abundance, in all his richness, is with us, regardless. It's not something that happened 2,000 years ago, unconnected to us now; it's not a promise of something consigned to the next life or sometime else - we have it now. Distress and struggle in our lives are still realities, but we have in us and with us and around us all that God is.

### **Expect More**

Dare to expect more. Let's dare to open ourselves to the extravagance of God that's here with us and in us. Reach out, reach within: don't just *taste* that overflowing gift of new wine, drink it in deeply; let it affect you and inebriate you in the best possible way; and let the joy and glow of it radiate out to others around.