

When the Wine Runs Out
John 2:1-11
Frist Presbyterian, Taos—January 19, 2025

They were at a party
and the wine ran out.
Was it bad planning?
Were there more guests
than anyone expected?
Did the guests
overstay their welcome?

The story gives us no word about
why the wine ran out.
The story just says that
the wine ran out.

That happens sometimes
to the good times in life.
They just run out.
Not at every party.
Not every week of the year.
But no one escapes the inevitable.
Sooner or later,
the wine runs out.
Because nothing lasts forever.

We start a new job,
a new relationship,
a new job,
a new venture in the church.
And as we begin,
we're filled with all kinds of delight,
and giddiness,
and sparkle.

Oh, is it ever delicious!
"Riding on the pulse of life,"
one writer called it.

But sooner or later,
that spirit and energy
can begin to fall flat.

The infamous mid-life crisis;
a death;
a time of uncertainty about vocation;
an illness;
fears about the state of affairs
in our country....

The list can go on and on.
It happens to communities, too.
I think, for instance, of what has happened

in the church
 during the last several decades.
 In the '50's and '60's,
 churches were
 riding on the pulse of life.
 You could build a church
 and people would just flock to it.
 Sunday School classes
 were bursting at the seams.
 Nurseries were overflowing.

Well, it's no secret,
 that old wine
 has run out.

The wine runs out for individuals.
 And the wine can run out for communities.
 Maybe we see it coming.
 Or maybe we just wake up one morning
 and realize it's happened.

Sooner or later,
 from time to time,
 in every life,
 the wine runs out.
 So, what then?

Well, let's look at what happens in the story.
 There were six stone water jars
 that were used for the religious ceremonies
 of the Jewish people at that time.
 And each held
 twenty or thirty gallons of water.
 Let's be conservative.
 Let's say it was six jars
 that held just twenty gallons a piece.
 Six times twenty.
 That's one hundred twenty gallons of liquid
 that Jesus turned into wine.
 One hundred twenty gallons
 of *very good wine*.
 I wonder how many guests there were...
 This was a tiny village.
 Everybody in the village was probably there.
 But still...
 one hundred twenty gallons?!
 That's still a lot of
 really good wine!!!
 Let's please not get distracted with worrying
 about how the people had
 too much wine to drink.

Alcohol use disorder is a real concern—
 a huge concern—
 for individuals and families and communities.
 But excessive drinking
 is not the concern of this story.
 All through Scripture,
 wine is a symbol for the extravagant joy
 the Messiah will bring.
 And in the gospel of John,
 wine also represents
 the presence of the Spirit.
 So, let's try thinking of it this way:
 What Jesus produced here was at least
 one hundred twenty gallons—
 five or six bathtubs full—
 of joy and the presence of the Spirit.
 I think that's almost
 more joy and presence of the Holy Spirit
 than we can even imagine.
 And remember,
 it was better
 than any joy or presence of the Holy Spirit
 that the people had ever known before.
 One hundred twenty gallons
 of joy
 and the presence of the Spirit.
 Lordy!
 That's almost scary
 for a bunch of Presbyterians!
 You have to wonder
 if we could even handle that!

But when the wine runs out,
 we'd *like* to have the opportunity
 to handle that kind of joy
 and presence of the Spirit, wouldn't we?
 When the wine runs out,
 we wonder if there will ever be any joy again,
 if the Spirit will ever touch us again
 with new life and energy.

And those are the times
 when we need to read this story once again.
 Those are the times when we need to remember
 what Jesus did
 when the wine ran out.
 A fellow named Francis Rous,
 who was born in the 16th century,
 said,

"When the wine of natural joy is spent
and there is nothing left but the water of affliction,
then doth Christ turn this water into wine."

Christ can change the water of our tears
into the wine of rejoicing.
And Christ does this
in the strangest ways sometimes.

"God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,"
sang the African American community
in the '30's and '40's and '50's
(words from James Weldon Johnson's powerful hymn,
"Lift Every Voice and Sing").
"God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;
Thou who has by Thy might led us into the light;
Keep us forever in the path, we pray."

Those words had been an anthem
in the African American community
for so many weary years,
memorized by every school child
and repeated through countless silent tears
of discrimination
and denied opportunities
and heartbreak.

The wine of joy
that came at the end of the Civil War
had long ago run out.

But then something amazing happened.

In the middle of the 1950's,
there was a Ph.D. candidate from Boston University.
He had finished his coursework,
had everything done for his doctorate
but the dissertation.

He was married
with a family coming,
so he needed a way to earn a living
while he finished his Ph.D.
This fellow was also a preacher,
so he took a call to a little church
in Montgomery, Alabama
called the Dexter Ave. Baptist Church.

I've heard that he what he really wanted
was to hide out there in Montgomery—
just do what he had to do
to keep the church going
while he finished his dissertation.

And then, he wanted to be a scholar,
a professor,
maybe a college administrator or a dean.
But we know what happened instead.
Not long after he moved to Montgomery,
there was an African American seamstress
who refused to move to the back of the bus
when a white man came along and asked her to do so.
And that was the spark
that ignited the Montgomery bus boycott.
There was a need for a spokesperson for the boycott,
but none of the African American leaders
who had been in Montgomery for a while
were willing to take that risk.
So they called Martin King,
that new young preacher over at Dexter Ave.
and asked him if he wouldn't lead the bus boycott.
And through that preacher
who thought that he just wanted to live
the quiet life of a professor,
God took the weary years and silent tears of a people
and began to change them into
hope
and promise
and possibility
that lead,
not just to the integration of public transportation
in Montgomery,
but to the Civil Rights Act,
and the Voting Rights Act,
and to a significant transformation
in our entire country.
Now sure, there's a whole lot more transformation
that needs to happen.
We might even wonder
if the wine of the Civil Rights Movement
has now run out.

But for a bit, water was
turned into wine.
Tears were turned to rejoicing.
I wish I could give us all a recipe,
some magic words we could say,
some special act we could perform
to cause God to turn
every silent tear in the world
into wine of rejoicing.
But God doesn't always
work on our schedule.

There's a popular song and saying
 in the African American community—
 "Our God's an on-time God."
 "May not come when you want him," the song goes.
 "Be there right on time.
 He's an on-time God,
 Yes, He is."

There is no recipe.
 There are no magic words.
 And certainly, there's no schedule.
 Just a promise—
 when the wine runs out,
 Jesus is there.
 "When the wine of natural joy is spent
 and there is nothing left but the water of affliction,
 then doth Christ turn this water into wine."

It could be that God is calling *you* now
 to use your gifts to be the wine
 that replaces another person's
 waters of affliction.
 That's how it happens sometimes.
 Or maybe in your response to a new call,
 your own water of affliction
 will become wine of rejoicing.
 That's another way it can happen.
 Maybe you will walk into a situation next week,
 next month,
 next year
 that will turn your tears to joy.
 It's amazing how God works,
 what surprising people and situations
 God uses.

There is no recipe.
 There are no magic words.
 Just a promise—
 when the wine runs out,
 Jesus is there.
 "When the wine of natural joy is spent
 and there is nothing left but the water of affliction,
 then doth Christ turn this water into wine."

Trust that promise.
 Live into that promise.
 Believe that promise.
 Believe it even through the tears.
 For it is through the tears,
 and in the midst of the tears,
 that God often works
 the most powerful transformations.

Thanks be to God.
Amen.