
Walk in Love

A sermon by Canon Lauren Holder
Epiphany 2 – Year C

There's so much to love about this Gospel passage. In some ways I feel like the retelling of this first sign of Jesus in John's witness is sermon enough. Jesus, his mom, and his disciples are at a wedding—one that would have lasted a week. Have you ever been to a week-long wedding? I have. And it's exhausting. But it's also a lot of fun because you really get to know the couples' family and friends quite well. It also takes a lot of food and wine to keep a party going. Jesus' mom, who was apparently both observant and discreet, leans over to Jesus (or perhaps pulls him away from his dancing partner) and says, "They have no wine." And Jesus basically responds, "Not yet, mom." But Mary knows her son, perhaps better than he knows himself. So she turns to the servants and tells them to do whatever Jesus says to do. Jesus resists the urge to roll his eyes, and instead asks the servants to fill the large stone wash basins to the brim with water. They do. 120-180 gallons. And then he asks one of the servants to draw some out and take it to the chief steward. The steward, not realizing he's just tasted wine from a wash basin, declares it the best wine served yet! And praises the groom, who like the steward, has no knowledge of what has happened.

There's so much here! Scarcity, prodding, reluctance, transformation, secrecy, abundance, JOY!

As a mother, I'll admit I love how Mary names what's wrong, and then trusts Jesus to make it right—even when he hesitates.

It's not unlike our passage from Isaiah today: I will not keep silent!

I also love how Jesus takes every-day mundane objects, like wash basins and water, and turns them into vessels of abundance, revelry, and celebration. It is of course reminiscent of the baptisms we shared this time last week in this very spot, or the simple bread and wine becoming the sacred body and blood of Christ we'll receive so very soon around this altar.

And I love how different Jesus' approach is compared to our modern-day proclivity to publicly shame persons, businesses, and ideas at the drop of a hat. Jesus quietly saves the couple from disgrace.

But as I played with and pondered over this text throughout the week... as I asked myself, "what does this story tell us about God and God's hope for us?" Again and again I came back to the idea that the transformation from scarcity to abundance happens in relationship. In community.

It made me think of a recent trip I made to El Paso and Juárez, Mexico with Deacon Juan. We were representing the dean and our cathedral parish on a pilgrimage to the border, hoping to get a better sense of what's happening there and how it connects to us here. The first day of our travels, we visited a place called "Annunciation House." We were a little startled to find, on our arrival, a team of journalists from MSNBC filming our exchange with the house director, Ruben Garcia. But Ruben barely noticed the cameras, explaining this was just part of the every-day at Annunciation House. He then explained that he was so glad we arrived at the exact moment that we did because a bus of families would be arriving shortly, and they would need the chairs we were sitting in. He told us that every day he receives a text message from ICE letting him know how many people need housing. These are people seeking asylum, but who the government lacks shelter for, and so they

are permitted to stay with a family member until they are processed. It can take a night or two for them to get the bus tickets needed to depart El Paso, so ICE texts Ruben and asks how many he can house. On average, 2,000 a week are released to Annunciation House. As Ruben talked, the journalists rushed out—the bus had arrived. And so we got up from our seats to make room for the arriving families. It was a profoundly sobering moment to see parents, exhausted, walking in with their children. It was almost too much to take in, until a little girl beamed up at us and said, “Hola!” with a skip in her step. Scarcity transformed into abundance. And the transformation happens in relationship. Ruben could go to the border and protest immigration policies he disagrees with. But then 2,000 people a week would have no place of comfort and safety. So instead he’s in relationship with ICE and Central Border Patrol, who like the families seeking asylum, want to live in a place that is safe and secure. Ruben knows we’re more alike than we are different. He knows it because he has opened himself up to relationships. And while he made it crystal clear that there’s still scarcity, and he needs volunteers to help, he serves more people each week than Jesus made gallons of wine—that’s pretty abundant.

How many times have you transformed because of someone you knew?

Perhaps you were uncomfortable with the idea of same-sex marriage until your favorite niece invited you to her wedding. Perhaps you despised those coldhearted conservatives or liberal snowflakes until you realized your mentor voted differently than you. Maybe you used to think religion was a sham, and yet here you are! Or you grew up in the church thinking women shouldn’t speak up or lead, but again, here you are!

I can think of countless times I have been transformed from a posture of scarcity, cynicism, skepticism, emptiness, or even hate—to abundance, honesty, authenticity, and love—all because of relationships. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Beloved Community knew something about this.

We were created to be in relationship. We were created in the image and likeness of God—a triune God who is in relationship with Godself. There’s a reason solitary confinement is considered cruel and unusual punishment—even for introverts! And sometimes we resist that truth and cut ourselves off from being transformed into something greater and truer.

In a few minutes, the dean will give us the offertory sentence—perhaps saying, “Walk in love as Christ loved us!” And later as you leave this building, perhaps you’ll exit through the atrium and literally walk in love as you see the letters L-O-V-E between the doors. These aren’t just words. This is who we are called to be as followers of Jesus, as the church in Christ. Love. It doesn’t happen in a vacuum. It happens in relationship.

My prayer for us this week is to love boldly. Not just comfortably. To open ourselves up to unsuspecting relationships. And maybe we too will be transformed. Amen.