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“They have no wine.”

Now, you know as well as I that that’s more than just an observation from Mary. Inherent in that observation is an expectation, a request, even a command.

It’s like when you walk past the garbage can and say to your teenage son, “Boy, howdy, that garbage is really piling up.” Or, when you look out the kitchen window and say, “Goodness gracious, look at the how much that grass has grown.” Or, when you hear the ding-dong that lets you know that the cycle has finished, and you say, “Well, that load of dishes is done.” Those are observations, for sure. But, they’re more than just observations. Inherent in such observations is an expectation, a request, even a command. “Do something.”

Sometime in the course of the wedding reception, they ran out of wine. That might not sound like much of a problem to you, but trust me, the Mother of God would not be pulling strings trying to get her son to do something about a problem that was no big deal. It was a very big deal.

In the context of this passage of Scripture, wine is a symbol of life and fullness, of hospitality and welcome, of friendship and connection, of fun and celebration. It’s not an incidental. It is an essential.

That’s what I want you to hear in Mary’s observation-slash-request-slash-command. “They have no wine.” “Jesus, they are now lacking something that is basic and essential.” “They have no wine” may as well read, “They don’t have what they need.”

This is Human Relations Day in the United Methodist Church. It’s no accident that we United Methodists observe Human Relations Day on the Sunday closest to the holiday honoring Dr. King. Following in his footsteps, Human Relations Day invites us to labor for a world where there are no haves and have nots, but a world where justice is done. This is a day for raising our awareness and calling us to social action to address and heal the ills and inequities that continue to plague our world and injure people.

At first blush, it may be a bit difficult to comprehend why we would read the story of a wedding reception without wine on a day of consciousness-raising and social awareness. But, we know exactly why John 2 and Human Relations Day work so well together. Because, we’re talking about more than a beverage at a gathering. We are talking about the essentials. We’re talking about what’s necessary. We’re talking about more than filling a glass with some juice. We’re talking about filling human lives with what they need.

And, I can hear Mary today looking at our world and then turning and looking at her son and saying to him just what she said so long ago. "They have no wine."

People need love and acceptance. People need to be embraced and welcomed. And, still today, there are ways in which we shun one another based on gender or race or status or orientation. They have no wine.

People need food and clothing and shelter, a warm place to stay and some warm hearts to hold them. And, still today, there are people, in this very neighborhood, who go without the food or the clothing or the shelter they need. They have no wine.

People need healing and reconciliation, a way to move beyond the hurts they have experienced and a way to move into the forgiveness Jesus wants for them. So many today, perhaps even some in this room, live with the burden of relational estrangement. They have no wine.

And, of course, on this Human Relations Day 2010, there is no more compelling or tragic example of unmet human need than in Haiti, where people struggle with death and hopelessness and squalor on a scale unimaginable to you and me. They have no wine.

I was thinking this week not only about the parallels between that wedding at Cana and our world today but about the one thing that's different between then and now. Of course, we can see the heart of Mary breaking at the suffering and injustice on the planet. We can hear her quiet lament about situations of brokenness and unmet need. We can hear her footsteps as she makes her way to her son and tells him that the wine has run out. And, because he did what his Mother asked, we can hear the laughter and the joy and the celebration that results from the replete image of gushing wine. There are so many ways in which that day at Cana and this day mirror one another. But, there's one difference, one striking, compelling, stark difference.

When Mary looks out over the landscape of the world in 2010, and when she tells her son that for so many people the wine has run out, he's not here to do anything about it. And so, there's one other profound part of this equation of justice and welcome and kindness and relief. And, that, good friends, is you and me.

"They have no wine," Mary says to Jesus. And, then, he looks at us. He looks at the people who are supposed to be his body. He looks at the people who say they are his hands and his feet, his voice in the world. And, if what we claim is true, if we are the body of Christ, then people in 2010 should not be able to tell the difference between Jesus working to solve a problem and our working to solve a problem. They should not be able to tell the difference. Are we his body? Do we do what he did? We are his response to the essential needs people face every day.

We are an inclusive community of faith. Everyone is welcome here. No exceptions. We are sensitive to the needs of those around us. And, where we see a need, we attempt to fill it.

Look around. There are empty wine glasses everywhere. And, as the body of Christ, our job is fill them up, with the life and the plenty and the care and the welcome and the love and the acceptance of Jesus. How do we do that?

Listen for your own calling. A calling is nothing more and nothing less than an intersection between some need in the world and something that you can do. Listen for your own calling, and what you need to do will become quickly apparent. Continue to support the ministry of Embry Hills United Methodist Church. In so many ways and through so many people, this church is so wonderfully focused on filling empty glasses, of pouring the life and the love of Jesus into the hearts of others. There are so many amazing stories of touched lives and filled cups and warmed hearts as a result of the ministry of this congregation. And, your support for this ministry enables our ministers, both ordained and lay, to do Cana work in this community and beyond.

And, if on this day of tragedy in Haiti, you wish to make an extra gift, make your check payable to the church and carefully mark it for UMCOR Haiti Relief, and know that 100% of every dollar you give will end up right there.

They have no wine. We all know what that's like. There have been times in each of our lives when the wine ran out. And, didn't know what to do. Thank goodness for Mary and for Jesus and for his body, the Church, seeking to fill people lives with all that they need.

John 2:1-11  
Embry Hills UMC  
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