

2 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and 2 Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. 3 When the wine ran out, Jesus' mother said to him, "They don't have any wine."

4 Jesus replied, "Woman, what does that have to do with me? My time hasn't come yet."

5 His mother told the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Nearby were six stone water jars used for the Jewish cleansing ritual, each able to hold about twenty or thirty gallons.

7 Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water," and they filled them to the brim. 8 Then he told them, "Now draw some from them and take it to the headwaiter," and they did. 9 The headwaiter tasted the water that had become wine. He didn't know where it came from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew.

The headwaiter called the groom 10 and said, "Everyone serves the good wine first. They bring out the second-rate wine only when the guests are drinking freely. You kept the good wine until now." 11 This was the first miraculous sign that Jesus did in Cana of Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him.

(Common English Bible)

I'm sure a lot of you saw the cartoon that was circulating on social media near the end of 2021. A number of characters were crouching at a distance from the door to 2022, pushing it open with a broom handle, apparently afraid of what was in store. I shared it. Maybe you did too. It was a perfect single frame expression of the feeling at the turning of this particular year. Sometimes January 1 feels like a fresh, clean start. I even think it felt so just a year ago, but now we are just months away from entering the third year of a global pandemic, and daily case counts are the highest they've ever been, and it's hard to walk into this year feeling confident and hopeful. Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose— the more that changes, the more that stays the same. And so it has long been. That's a very old saying.

Your creative worship team discerned that the right sign to put before you this week is "Bumps Ahead." This is a useful sign for our times and for the time of our Gospel reading this morning. Any roads we travel will be bumpy— this is the human condition. For the past couple years and indeed the first week of this year the road has

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been super bumpy. But if you see a sign like that, what do you do? You slow down. You stay aware. You keep going.

It seems as though Jesus saw a sign that there would be bumps ahead for him. John's Jesus is undoubtedly omniscient. When his ministry gets started he knows that it will lead to conflict, suffering, death, in pretty short order. At this point in the Gospel he has gathered some followers, but he hasn't DONE anything yet. When we left him last week he was saying as much to Nathanael who was super impressed by Jesus' knowledge about him; Jesus assured Nathanael that he hadn't seen anything yet.

So now Jesus' mother, who doesn't have a name in the Gospel of John, Jesus, and his disciples are at a party- a wedding feast. These were often several day affairs. And it seems it has been a good party. All the wine provided has been consumed. Jesus was probably reclining at table, enjoying the company of family and friends when his mother points out that there is no more wine. It's not a command. It's not even a question. But there's something about the power of a mother's simple act of observation— it can evoke a sense of great personal responsibility on the part of one's offspring. And so Jesus responds rather petulantly, "Woman, what does that have to do with me? My time hasn't come yet." Now that reads as exceedingly rude in our cultural context. To address your mother as "woman"? I don't think it was quite as harsh in that time and place, but there is edge to it. One gets the sense that Jesus is reluctant to intervene. One also gets the sense that his mother knows he will.

But let's think for just a few minutes about Jesus' reluctance. It could be that this was small potatoes, providing wine for a wedding feast? And Jesus wanted to launch his ministry in a bigger, showier way. It could also be that he knows that once he acts publicly, using the power of God in public, that there's no turning back and he is trepidatious about the bumps ahead. It's a little like Jesus is crouching by the door with a broom handle extending before him. He is hesitant to get started; he doesn't think it's time. His mother knows it is.

So Jesus addresses the servants, asks them to fill six large stone vessels nearby to the brim with water. I'm curious how they did this? Did they have a hose? Surely they didn't lift the vessels... I have a hard enough time with plastic water cooler jugs— I can't imagine lifting a 20-30 gallon stone vessel, filled... Anyhow, they get the six jugs filled

Prepared by Pastor Sarah Sanderson-Doughty for St. Andrew's Presbyterian, Portland, OR and then Jesus tells them to draw from one and take it to the head waiter. The servants probably think he's nuts, but they do as he says and the waiter tastes from the sample delivered to him and he is blown away. This is good wine, the best wine he's tasted all night. He goes to the groom and asks why he saved the good wine for the end of the party.

This is a very subtle miracle. Most of the people there don't even know it happened. The headwaiter doesn't even know— he credits the groom with stashing away good wine and bringing it out at the end. Only the servants and the disciples, and of course Jesus and his mother, seem to know what has transpired. No one sees the transformation take place. But something amazing happened. Quietly it happened, but it happened. And so Jesus' ministry begins.

His first disciples identified him as the Messiah. This moment likely confirmed their initial perceptions for there are many prophetic promises about wine flowing freely and abundantly when the Messiah comes. And they were probably super glad to be following the guy who keeps the party going. They were probably less aware of the bumps ahead, but soon enough they would be aware.

My prayer for us, St. A's, at the beginning of 2021 is that we would be aware, watching for the ways God's provision unfolds in everyday situations, slowing down and noticing what is changing, where life and healing are emerging. It's not always big and showy... sometimes it is incredibly subtle. But we travel this bumpy road with the power of God resident in our hearts, and we need to keep on keeping on, trusting God to provide, protect, and bless us through all the bumps ahead.

This sermon was influenced by:
Amy Robertson and Robert Williamson Jr. "Episode 321: Water into Wine (John 2:1-11)" on their BibleWorm Podcast. <https://www.biblewormpodcast.com/e/water-into-wine-john-21-11/>