

## EPIPHANY II – 2022

May the words of my mouth, ....

The wedding reception we read about today has all the makings of a disaster waiting to happen. They run out of wine. That's bad enough, and they must have been scrambling to get more, while the parents were standing there in shock and shame that they had not provided enough. So, Aunt Mary decides to get involved and meddle in the midst of this, going to her son and laying the problem on him: "They have no wine." Well, far be it for the Lord and Savior of Humankind to be rude to his mother and start a family fight. Jesus' biographers would never have printed that part of such a story. But Jesus does brush her off and tells her it is not yet his time, in other words, he is not yet ready to go public with his gifts and his ministry. Mary acts as if she hasn't even heard him and simply instructs the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Did they have words then, or when they got home that night? We shall never know. This is all of the story we shall ever hear.

What leads Jesus to do something? We don't know that either. I rather doubt that it was the embarrassment of the parents that moved him. I can imagine that he had some compassion for the bride and groom, who might have been remembered in that town forever as the couple at whose wedding they ran out of wine. Nice to have that brought up at every wedding that followed. Yes, I can imagine compassion for them and a wanting to help them out, and yet he wasn't rich, could probably not afford to go to the merchant to buy more, or maybe the merchant was closed, so the normal options for solving the problem were not there for him. But he had never used his powers to do something extraordinary before—no healings, no brilliant teachings, no resurrections. He must have wondered whether this was too frivolous

a circumstance in which to do something extraordinary, or, as the author tells us to do a miracle.

Jesus is very subtle about this when he does decide to act. He doesn't announce to the groom or his family that he'll take care of this. He doesn't get everyone's attention and make an elaborate show of it. Think of the feeding of the 5,000 or the 4,000. There he is in the midst of those huge crowds, wanting to give them something to eat, and he has next to nothing to offer. I think there he may have done a bit of grandstanding, particularly when he asked a blessing on those loaves and fish. I can picture him raising his arms as high and wide as he could and begin the blessing over food, "Boruch atto Adonai!" I can imagine people in the crowd craning their necks to see, wondering if he and his friends were going to sit down and have lunch right there in front of them and leave them out. But no, he lifted up the baskets and elaborately gave them to his friends who started passing out the food.

But Jesus does not do anything like that here. He quietly goes up to the servants and tells them to fill up the water jars—to the brim. They do. And then he tells them to take enough of it for the wine steward to taste. And when he does, that's when they all realize that this is no longer water, but wine. Actually, only the servants know. The steward only knows that this is good, really good, so good that it breaks precedent, for they have saved it until last. The steward, delighted, calls the bridegroom and tells him how terrific this is, and the bridegroom is, at least at this point, totally in the dark about what happened. Only the servants know. But the disciples were watching all of this, and they caught on, probably especially so when they got to taste this new wine.

I want you to note something here. Those water jugs held between 20 and 30 gallons each, let's say 150 gallons in all. A friend of mine, when

preaching on this text many years ago, commented by saying, “that was enough wine to lay out the whole town.” *Enough to lay out the whole town.* In other words, there was way more than enough. Way more.

This is the first miracle which has to do with food, and the one thing that is consistent in all of them is that there is way more than enough. It takes us back to the people of Israel in the wilderness, when manna appeared every day. They were told to take only what they needed for the day (two days over the weekend), and the rest disappeared. If they took more than they needed, it spoiled in their houses. Their wants were satisfied, but there was never so much that they could sell it, trade it, get rich off of it. The true richness was in being satisfied.

There are a few other miracles that have to do with food. I have mentioned two of them, the feedings of four and five thousand. In each case the leftovers were gathered up, probably to feed others who were not there, and they had more leftovers than the food they had before Jesus’ blessing. I can imagine that people in the crowd dug into their sacks and pockets and pulled out what they had brought along for the day—perhaps more bread, some cheese, dried sausage, dried fruit, throwing some of it into the baskets so it could be passed to others. Yes, I know we always hear this as a multiplication of food, which it may have been. But I think it no less of a miracle—in fact even more miraculous—for that crowd to be moved to share what they had brought along, to make it a common meal. Jesus started something with his faith, with his prayer, with his actions, and just like at the wedding, there was an abundance of what was needed as a result.

On another occasion, some of them were fishing all night, without catching anything. Jesus came along and suggested they cast their nets on the other side of the boat. There was some grumbling, for what did a carpenter’s son know about fishing? But they did as he said and

when they pulled up the nets, they were bursting with the weight of so many fish. They almost sank the boat. While the disciples went off to sort out the keepers and the throwbacks, Jesus built a fire and prepared a huge breakfast for them with food he got from somewhere, which we will never know. They counted 153 fish that were keepers, big enough to eat, big enough to sell, and in addition, they had a huge breakfast. Abundance again, more than enough.

*ENOUGH!* That's a word we don't hear very often in our society. A favorite game at every lake I have visited is one played by the men: "He who has the most toys when he dies, wins." I am not sure what the victory is about, but I get reminded of this every week on my drive back and forth from my home. The number of toy wagons being towed by cars is astounding.

Every time there are new housing starts, there are new storage facilities that are constructed nearby. You have seen them, rows and rows of them. We not only fill our attics and our basements and our garages; now we rent other places to keep some of what we have, whether we are going to use it or not. A friend of mine in Memphis built one some years after I left there, a big building, with internal storage, guards and coded gates. Rich people left their art there when going on vacation. A woman could pick up her favorite jewelry on the way to the symphony or the country club dance and return it on the way home. No worries. But my friend was very clever because he already sold and patrolled home security systems. He got richer helping people feel safe about what they owned.

The battle that we have with our government over taxes is to keep all of our money, if we can, and some people and many corporations have found loopholes and ways to do so. Yet we are not just content to do it in this life; we set up foundations to maintain control of our wealth

even from the grave. Some of those controls are so stringent that we cannot use the money that is there. I had a discretionary fund when serving another church that had almost \$150k in it, and the expressed need for some of that money each year did not equal the earned income. I could not give enough of it away! The hospital fund for the three downtown churches, set up years ago, had a million dollars in it, the income from which was to help parishioners, only with hospitable bills. In this day and age, with good insurance, few people actually needed it, and we spent more to banks and lawyers administering that fund than we gave away. In addition, the restrictions were so tight that I knew it would take years to change them so we could use the money for something just as worthwhile.

*ENOUGH!* As bishop, I served over a hundred churches, and you can imagine the number of potlucks I attended. That's where I learned that it is most often the case that generosity is inversely proportional to wealth, in other words, poorer people give more (proportionally) than rich people. Given that I stood at the door to greet people after the liturgy, I often got to the coffee hour well after it started. In churches with a wealthy congregation, by the time I got there, only crumbs were left. In churches with people who were not well off, there was always an abundance of food, so much so that the elders were sent home with an extra plate, and some was taken to the shut-ins. I have never forgotten an early experience when, on the Sunday of the annual parish meeting, the youth group and I set up and watched over the tables of food at the potluck. When the congregation finished eating, there was nothing left, and I had to order pizzas for the youth group.

*ENOUGH!* That is really a state of mind, isn't it? I learned what enough is when I lived in the inner city. One month when we were down to our last \$50 around the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month, I feared that we would not have enough. A young woman came to our door, carrying a baby and with a

toddler in hand asking for help with food, milk and diapers. That was on the 28<sup>th</sup>, and I was sure our cupboard was bare, but when I looked, I found enough to put together two shopping bags of canned and packaged food and found \$5 to give her for milk and diapers. Ever since then, I remind myself that I have enough—more than enough!

What reminds you that you have more than enough?

Last night I cracked open the fortune cookie that came with my take-out Chinese dinner, and this is what I read on the little slip of paper: “He who knows he has enough is rich.” I kid you not! I can just hear the translation in the King James Version of the Bible: “And Jesus said to them, ‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, he who knows he has enough is rich.’” *Amen.*

+JLJ