

January 14, 2018
Justice Matters
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John 2:1-11

[The Wedding at Cana]

2 On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3 When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6 Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 9 When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." 11 Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Justice Matters, friends. It must, if we are to be the church that Jesus' mother prophesied. *Thy kingdom come*, He Himself taught us to pray, *on earth as it is in heaven*. This kingdom of God, which Mary described in Luke 1, is the heart of biblical justice. The kingdom of God is where God's people take seriously God's plainly stated preference for the poor, the stranger, the refugee, the dispossessed, the prisoner, the oppressed. *The kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven* is also where God's people take seriously God's plainly stated promise that from us who have been given so much, much is expected. Biblical justice is lived out in three-way partnership between God, humanity, and the non-human creation.

God and the non-human creation have kept their part of this covenant, while humanity's record is . . . spotty – having risen to great heights now and then, but mostly doing too little too late. Because, at the end of the day, the work of justice is hard. It takes lots of time and energy – time and energy that those of us with time and energy to spare might otherwise spend feathering our own nests or binge-watching Netflix.

Justice Matters, friends. It must, if we are to be the church. But if *being church* doesn't matter, then neither does justice. In which case let us at least tell the truth – and change our sign to *University Baptist Country Club and Democratic Caucus*. But if *being church*

matters, and I know that it does to you, then my hope, prayer and intention is that 2018 will be the year in which *justice matters* to us more than it ever has before – the year we take bigger steps in:

- ~ our understanding of biblical justice;
- ~ our identity as a people committed to biblical justice;
- ~ our activity in the work of biblical justice in our own time and place.

In my preaching binder I have a page for every preaching week of the year. At the top of each one I've written **JUSTICE MATTERS** in green sharpie. I want it in view as I start every sermon. I'm going to go back and write DO THE MATH! in red on every page too, because I believe there's not a case of injustice that is not, at its root, economic. We shall see how it goes, beginning in John, chapter 2, with a text so full of sermons a deadbeat preacher can milk it for a year and a working preacher never run out.

Jesus had no intention of starting His ministry at this wedding. Cana was even more of a no-place than Nazareth. No one even knows where it was. Scholars have three spots in mind it might have been; the closest is less than a mile from Nazareth, the furthest about 12 miles – all of which count as walking distance.

If Nazareth had 200-400 people and we can still find it, how small do you suppose Cana was? But to its people it was home, and they were having a wedding. And by design or default, the wedding family had not ordered enough wine. Given how people – folks related to me, at least – behave around free food and drink, I know how easily this can occur. Still, hospitality requires a host to anticipate such enthusiasm by their guests, and plan accordingly.

These hosts – Mary's friends – didn't. For whatever reason. And now they are about to be really embarrassed. The guests who've had nothing will not think poorly of the early guests who've been through the line three or four or five times. But rather – their host. They will think him stingy and inhospitable – which again is the LAST notion the fathers of a bride or groom want thought of them by their friends and neighbors. It was the greatest of shames.

So Mary makes it her business. As would I, not because I am bossy or a busybody, mind you, but because I am HELPFUL. She finds Jesus and His friends – in the food or wine line no doubt – pulls Him out and tells Him, *the wine is going to run out*. Someday I'm going to spend a whole week just thinking about this partnership of Mary and Jesus. He is her son and her Lord. She is His mother and His disciple. They are both servant to and authority over the other. So few words pass between them. The ones that do scratch my ears, begging to be softened – for my sake only, though. Not Mary's. Not Jesus'.

She doesn't tell Him to DO anything. She doesn't have to. Like good mothers of good sons, she knows He knows what she wants Him to do. And He does. John says only the servants

and the disciples knew the truth – that it was Jesus' first sign. It revealed His glory, and the disciples believed in Him.

The glory, it seems to me, is in the math. Friends, I want not simply to suggest, but rather to insist, that this math is a sign of God's notion of justice. The math tells us something central to biblical justice.

To do the math, I first had to read up on wine. I found a blog called WinoWoman.com WinoWoman is a graduate of the French Culinary Institute of California and Yale University and is a master sommelier. Assuming you are serving beer but no liquor, she recommends two glasses of wine per guest. *Knowing most guests will drink only one glass*, she says. I literally wonder, has this woman ever been to an actual wedding . . . and if so, whose? I can guarantee it was not in Indiana, Kentucky, Missouri or Arkansas. But nevertheless

Most wine is sold in 750 ml bottles like this one made by my cousin Dick, in his basement in Terre Haute, Indiana. WinoWoman says there are six glasses of wine in here. Again – don't know who is pouring for her, but we'll go with her math, as she graduated from Yale. John says that after the initial stock of wine ran out, Jesus delivered 180 MORE gallons of the best wine any of them ever tasted. Do you have any idea how many 750 ml bottles are in 180 gallons? I do: 900.

My favorite wine is Dry Red Blend from Oliver Winery. I doubt it is the best wine ever made in the history of wine, but I like it. It costs \$8.99 at Sam's Club and \$12 at Oliver Winery – however, there's a 30% discount if you buy more than three cases. I know this because I called them – not because I'm in the habit of buying more than three cases of wine at a time. 900 bottles = 75 cases. 75 cases would cost \$7,560.00 at the Winery. The 2017 winners of domestic wines cost about \$75 a bottle OR \$67,500 for 900 bottles. 900 bottles = 5,400 glasses of wine at WinoWoman's pour. Not Carl Briggs' pour.

At two glasses per guest – WinoWoman's generous estimate – plus-2700 guests were at the wedding at Cana. Which is absurd. The population of Galilee within walking distance of Cana wasn't 2700. Besides, nobody living in Cana at that time could have afforded that. OR, nobody who could afford that would have lived in Cana. Everyone knew Jed Clampitt couldn't stay in Tennessee once he got rich, right? Galileans were poor: peasants, heavily-taxed subsistence farmers and workers. That they had never tasted such amazing wine was not exactly remarkable.

A huge wedding in Cana would have been 200 guests. 5,400 glasses of wine for 200 guests? Even the way Carl Briggs pours, that's more than 20 glasses per guest. Of course I'm being silly. I wish I could be as outrageous as I want. I wish I could stack 5,400 wine glasses around this room. I wish I could open 900 bottles of red wine and let that smell fill this room. Because I really, really want you to get the same sensory experience those first

disciples had of the grace of God poured out for us. Because it's right here in the math! Abundance! Generosity! This is the nature of biblical justice!

When human beings make a mess and Jesus fixes it, He doesn't go around with a ruler measuring out precisely one glass of wine per person, like WinoWoman.com. He doesn't double that and call it *generous*, like we do when we give poor people our *nice* old clothes. He gives the poorest, most forgotten people on the planet (Cana is **literally forgotten!**) better than they would ever have known to ask for, and more than they can ever, ever, ever use in this lifetime.

The math of human justice says everyone gets one. The math of human generosity says everyone gets two. But because human beings are both stingy and greedy, our ideas of justice OR generosity rarely work to anyone's advantage. Either we are passive-aggressively obliging others to accommodate our stinginess. Or we are soaking up our privilege like we deserve it *because we got here first*. Or *because we followed the rules and worked hard*. Or *certainly are not as rich as so many other people*. All those reasons are only useful to people who are NOT interested in *being church*.

We are not here to justify ourselves, but rather to exercise biblical justice in this time and place. So we find ourselves as the hosts in this wedding story in the land of scarcity – a bed we made for ourselves by design or default, but one that we most definitely DO NOT want to lie in. *What does that have to do with me?* Jesus asks. Fair question.

We Protestants all grew up knowing that “*God helps those who help themselves.*” Amen? Hard work ALWAYS precedes prayer. Thus needy people are people who haven't worked hard enough. *God helps those who help themselves.* We think it without even meaning to. Except that's not the first sign of His glory, is it? Jesus agreeing with us that those greedy guests should have been more grateful for the two glasses allotted to them. After all, it's free, and they were really only entitled to one. The flash of the first sign of His glory was however-much time and energy it took however-many servants to schlep 180 gallons of water from the spring to the jars. (180 gallons of water weighs 1501 pounds, by the way.) It was however-much time and energy it took however-many stewards to draw and deliver 5,400 glasses. It was however-much time and energy it took however-many guests to raise however-many glasses of this new wine they'd just been handed, however-much time and energy it took to tip those glasses and discover what biblical justice tastes like when it's drawn up, measured and poured out by the hand of God.

Later, Jesus will describe it as “*living water so satisfying we will never be thirsty again.*” The math of biblical justice is the math of abundance, of generosity and of grace. Remember, the wine is only a sign of what Jesus is *going* to do. He didn't come to improve our parties. He came to save our souls, that we might have more life than we ever dreamed a human being could have. Not more years – more life! Gallons and gallons and gallons of life! Extravagant life.

For those of us already drowning in the securities of this world, we've been offered the privilege of extravagant service. Of never withholding from others for fear of our own losses. Of never hoarding joy or lying awake heart-broken with worry.

Speaking to the Anti-Defamation League in 1963, President Kennedy spoke of the United States as a country built by 40 million immigrants. Except for failing to mention all who came by slave ship – no small omission – his speech is wonderful. He spoke of OUR responsibility to BE the country they imagined and built. "*We are equal to this great inheritance*," he said. I found it healing after this week's vitriol. Because at the end of the day, friends, biblical justice is not born of what we think or what we say. Biblical justice comes to life *on earth as it is in heaven*, because of what we do and how we live.

May Jesus find us generous and ever confident of the abundance of grace and courage with which He has already supplied the church in this time and place. Would you pray with me?