

***1** 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. **12** After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days.*

One of the things that makes a movie or a tv show successful is when it has subplots that, while separate from the main plot, helps to add tension and complexity to the story. When John tells this story of Jesus at the wedding, we are clearly to understand that this story is about Jesus. John doesn't call it a miracle when Jesus turns water to wine, he calls it a sign...an event that is pointing us to a deeper truth. 180 gallons worth of truth, as John helps us to understand that the Messiah has come to use sacred traditions in new, fruitful ways. Jesus has come to change things for the better.

The subplot, however, is centered on Mary. John doesn't even give her a name. Here she is "the mother of Jesus," but her role in the story is a vital one, even though she only speaks two sentences,

"They have no wine." Is the first. That is all she says, but if this were a movie, we would have noticed some things as the camera swept over the scene. We might have noticed the stressed out parents of the bride, watching the servants nervously as empty wine bottles gathered in the trash heap. We might have noticed the cups being rationed, the concerned whispers of people wondering how they will avoid this social disaster. One, after all, does not run out of wine at a wedding.

We don't have that camera lens view, but I'm guessing Mary did. Or maybe she had a front row seat. Maybe she was related...maybe the parents were childhood friends...maybe she was vested somehow in saving their honor. Or maybe not. Maybe she was a bystander who happened to notice the drama unfolding in the shadows. All we know for sure is she knew it was happening...and she knew who could fix it.

What we can't tell from John's story is whether Jesus is being playful with his mother or rude.

"Woman, what concern is this to me and you?" He asks. I bristle at that. Mary doesn't seem too. I want to be smart back and say, "what concern? I'll give you concern!" But...well...he's a grown man at this point. What's a mother to do?

For one...believe in her son and his ability to change the current situation.

I still argue that Mary's words are among the most powerful prayers in all of scripture. She ignores his sass, or playfulness, or whatever it was...and simply turns to the servers and says, "Do what he says."

Maybe she knows her son well. Maybe she knows that when presented with a need, he can't ignore it...even if his hour is not yet here.

Mary sees a need, she takes it to Jesus and says, "do what he says."

We notice immediately something we have noticed in almost all miracle stories, Jesus acts in partnership with others in order to achieve the miracle. The servants carry out what Jesus says to do, but only after Mary notices the need.

Yes, the story is about Jesus and how his life will change the world for the better, but the story doesn't work without the subplot of Mary, quietly observing and watching out for the wedding hosts. It doesn't work without Mary, showing loving concern for others. It doesn't work without Mary's compassion...it doesn't work without Mary's faith in Jesus that he can change the situation.

Jesus changes things for the better...Jesus is powerful enough to turn water to wine...Jesus is powerful enough to tackle issues of racial justice and the socio-economic struggles of homelessness and poverty...but he doesn't do so in isolation...he does so through people who are compassionately observing the world and lovingly concerned with making it better.

Tomorrow, we celebrate Martin Luther King, Jr Day. I can't begin to sum up his life work in a short paragraph but we all know the sacrifice he made to help show the world the needs of his black community. He marched for them, was beaten for them, went to jail for them, was murdered for them...because he looked around and saw a need and took it to Jesus, who said, "do what I tell you." From the teachings of Jesus, Martin Luther King Jr modeled for us the power of peaceful resistance and its ability to make the world a better place. His work is not done...his dream is not realized...but he opened our eyes to the need and said, do what Jesus says.

For the past few weeks our flags have flown at half-staff in honor of President Jimmy Carter, who died on Dec. 29<sup>th</sup> at the age of 100. He had an amazing life but to me one of the most iconic photos of him was taken when he was 95 years old, he stands in the middle of a construction zone, doing what he had done since 1984 – building a house for Habitat for Humanity. He is bruised and swollen in the picture because the day before he had fallen and received 14 stitches in his head...but that day, he was back at work...95 years old.

In the past 40 years, Jimmy and Roselyn Carter worked on more than 4,300 homes, alongside over 100,000 volunteers, in 14 different countries. That work began in earnest when they were on a trip to New York and saw a Habitat building site at an apartment building. They stopped to check it out and saw that there weren't enough volunteers, so, they grabbed a few other volunteers and went back to help...and they never stopped helping. They saw a need, their faith called them to meet that need...and they did.

Can you imagine if either of these two men had seen the needs around them and said, "What concern is that of mine?"

Last year, a group of folks from this church started a journey. They were trying to figure out how we might use our facility, which sits empty much of the time, to meet the needs of our community. We went out into the community, we interviewed people, we looked at statistics, we found all kinds of needs but one stood out to us because we felt like it was one we could do something about. We could lease our building to a daycare and help with the daycare crisis in our community.

We didn't let it stop us when they said it would require a major remodel to meet the state standards for a daycare center. We didn't let it stop us when they said it would cost \$600,000. We found an amazing partner in the Wilkes Community Partnership for Children and we found grants to cover all except \$75,000! We aren't about to stop now, we are sure that God led us to this need and God will lead others to come to us with the last \$75,000 and complete this important work in order to serve our community.

When we started, we had no idea how we found find \$600,000 – but God provided through the hands of those who were also looking around and seeing unmet needs and wanting to help. Thanks be to God.

We could have said, "It's too much work." "It's too much money" "It's too much commitment."  
We could have said, "We don't have many children in our church, so what concern is it to us?"  
But we didn't say any of those things...because we know the heart of our mission here...we know the best things happen when needs are revealed and God responds through the work of the Church.

It is so easy to just see the familiar world around us and fail to see the needs and the problems that exist. Its why I love Mary's part of this story. She was observant, saw the need, took it to Jesus, brought others in to help do what Jesus said, and together...the need was met.

From racial injustice...to inadequate housing...to childcare shortages...we can see the people and families who struggle...what concern is it to us? We are the hands and feet of Christ...the world's concerns are our concerns. Only when we recognize that and act will we see the glorious miracle of God living among us.

Mighty God,

We are grieved when the world around us is troubled.

When children lack safe places to be cared for, when families can't afford decent living arrangements, when prejudice and bigotry cloud our ability to love and act justly, we know we have failed to love as you love and do as you do.

This week we celebrate the Saints who have shown us what it looks like to give our lives to helping meet the needs of others...and in so doing, letting your light be more fully visible in the world.

Now, let us prepare to rise and do likewise. Amen