

“Where’s the Miracle?”

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Rev. Michele Ward

Brown Memorial Park Avenue Presbyterian Church

This is one of those miracles most church-going types know. It is one of those strange Jesus moments that reminds us that he wasn’t all about curing the sight of the blind and resurrecting people from the dead, although those miracles are powerful in their own right. Jesus cares about drinking wine, too, this story seems to say. Well, not necessarily. Jesus does not think the wine running out at this wedding is his problem.

Jesus has been busy in the Gospel of John, and we’re only part way through the chapter. So far, his cousin John publically calls him the Messiah, testifies about Jesus and his ministry, and Jesus calls some of his first disciples: Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathaniel. Jesus decides to go with his newly gathered disciples to Galilee, leaving John the Baptist on the Jordan River outside of Bethany. It is on the third day in Galilee that Jesus finds himself at a wedding. We do not know who is getting married at this wedding or why Jesus happens to be there. But what we do know is that Mary has some thoughts to share with Jesus about the situation at this wedding!

The wine has run out. I repeat: the wine has run out.

Now--at most weddings, if there is any chance for the celebration to somehow stop, for the bride or the groom to feel upset, something must be done about it. Regardless of time or culture, the sanctity of celebrating a wedding with joy and without stress seem to be universal truths.

So, Mary turns to Jesus. I love this moment so much because Mary turns to Jesus, knowing full well that he can do something about this wedding emergency, and she says, “They have no wine.” She states this reality and expect results. She is behaving like a mother with child she wants to step up and step out. “Do your thing, Jesus! It’s your time to shine! Take care of this problem!”

I wonder if she has seen Jesus do things like this before, so she has reason to believe he’s capable of taking care of it. Did he do this for one of his brothers when he got married? Is he a wine miracle worker on the regular? I want to know the backstory for her statement-of-facts, it’s-your-move, Jesus, response.

How does Jesus respond to his mother? Does he say, “why of course, I love parties and don’t want this one to end.” Does he say, “This is exactly how I imagined the beginning of my ministry!” Does he say, “I am ready to be known for this and think this is an excellent way to gain the respect of my new recruits!”

He says none of these statements. Nothing remotely close.

Instead, he says, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.”

We have Jesus, who does not want to share the power that he has. It takes his mother to give him enough sense to do something about the issue. It takes someone else pushing him to act that makes this miracle happen in the first place.

The real miracle is not Jesus turning the water into wine. His powers were evident already in the Gospel of John. John the Baptist called out who he was publically, twice, in the previous chapter. People have already begun to follow him before he has done much of anything besides walk by John the Baptist and have him yell out that Jesus is the Messiah.

The real miracle is Mary changing his mind about doing something about the need that she sees at this wedding feast. The need that she knows that only Jesus can fill. Changing the mind of God is no small feat.

Moses kept God from destroying the people after the people worshipped the golden calf.

From a pass through read, it might look like Jesus just wanted to take a break. After all, he says to his mother, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” He believes that this wine running out isn’t his problem and it certainly isn’t her problem. They are guests. They are not the ones in charge. He might sound dismissive, perhaps a little snarky.

But I think he was genuinely wondering if this really mattered. Why else would he ask this question? Why else would he say this to her?

I wonder how often we find ourselves in the Mary-Jesus conversation in our lives. Whose responsibility is it to take care of the growing crisis? Who will take care of it before it is too late to fix it? And, who needs to take the first step towards making the situation better?

The miracle is not turning the water into wine. I think that is the easy miracle in this story. What isn't easy is letting someone agitate us into action, or being the one to agitate someone else. Because without that holy moment, there would be no wine whatsoever. Mary agitates Jesus into action. She tells him that something needs to be done, and it is in his interested to act on the issue. After all, his disciples are there, watching him and waiting to see what he will do. He is in his hometown, spending time with his family and disciples before traveling further at this stage of his ministry. He accepted Mary's invitation. She worked a miracle first that day.

And Jesus, the one with the significant power to make change happen, he does something, too. He works a miracle so compelling that it encourages people to believe more deeply in him and his work. He is willing to have his mind changed, and responds to Mary's agitation.

Community organizers use the word agitate like the way Dr. King does in the narrative that Hedrick Smith recorded decades ago. To agitate someone means to help them be true to themselves in order to inspire them to act in their interest. It isn't about telling someone what to do because you know more than they do. It is about getting at what motivates them to act in the world, and exploring ways that they can make steps towards bettering the circumstances they find themselves or others in.

Now, church, we need to talk about getting agitated today. Some of you are already agitated. Some of you were marching this weekend or might be marching tomorrow. And I want you to know how inspiring it is to see people gathering together to sing, shout, and stand in the face of injustice and hatred. Marching is good for solidarity, for visibility, for unity.

But if marching is all that happens, then it was no march at all. Marches go somewhere. Marches have a destination. Marches have a purpose. And if the marches that we attend do not go somewhere, do not have a destination, do not have a purpose, then they are field trips. If they do not change the way we live, the conversations that we are having, and the actions that we take to transform our neighborhoods, our communities, and ourselves, then we have not been properly agitated.

Remember those reasons that Dr. King listed for his agitation wherever he went? Those reasons are still here.

--Those reasons for Dr. King to agitate in cities and states, in our nation's capitol

--Those reasons for the Freedom Riders like Diane Nash to risk giving birth to her child in prison for the sake of desegregation

--Those reasons for Bayard Rustin to insist on being openly gay and a Civil Rights leader

Those reasons have not gone away.

Instead, they have intensified under the mythology of colorblindness and multicultural awareness. Hot, white hate has continued to grow and to spread. I saw some of that hate yesterday in the video recording of a group of white Catholic teenagers wearing MAGA hats mobbing Nathan Phillips, a member of the Omaha Nation, a Vietnam veteran, and the former director of Native Youth Alliance. I am not one to cast judgment on these young people, as I cannot claim to know their thoughts or what was going through their heads in that situation. What I can tell you is that I believe hate is something we learn. It is not something we are born feeling towards one another.

I was reminded of how important it is, during polarization and division, to choose to stand our sacred ground, as Brene Brown says it. Stand your sacred ground. Do not let the loud voices of hate and ridicule stop you from listening to what you know to be right deep down inside of you.

Tell someone in your world who has the ability to make change happen, no matter how small, that the wedding party is out of wine. And that they can do something about it, after all. And if they tell you that the wine running out isn't their problem, and it isn't your problem, remind them that none of us have wine until all of us have wine. Until everyone in Baltimore City has access to lead free water, none of us have clean water. Until every child in Baltimore City has access to mental health support, none of our city's children have the access they need. Until everyone can walk through the streets of their neighborhoods safely, none of us can walk home safely.

Go ahead, and agitate - you might get a miracle.

*Preacher's Note:*

I recommend this article by The Rev. Marcia Mount Schoop, ["Nothing But The Truth: A Word to White America after the Recent Unpleasantness in Washington, D.C."](#)

As the events around the MLK Weekend marches unfolded, I (Michele) turned to a friend of mine, Kyle Turver, Music Minister at Bethany Presbyterian Church in Seattle, Washington. He penned these prayers as a way to name his own privilege as well as pray for students

involved in the incident. These prayers are an expression of Kyle's spiritual wrestling with the incident and his own response to them as a cisgender heterosexual white man. I am reprinting his prayers with his permission.

A prayer for these young men:

Dear God, bring low these young men.

May they experience the depths of despair and shame.

Break them, O God, until tears of repentance run down their faces.

Comfort them, O God that they may see this hardness and hate is not manhood.

Forgive them, O God, that they may see gentleness and humility is your way.

A prayer of repentance:

Dear God, forgive me for the part of myself I recognize in those young men.

I am ashamed of the reflection I find in their faces.

Again today and everyday I turn away from, I repent of, that part of myself.

A prayer of thanksgiving for the indigenous drummer:

Thank you, O God, for the courage and faith of this elder.

O Great Spirit, in his face we see your own; not backing down, not fighting forward, but singing and creating beauty in the face of racism, injustice, and hate.

I worship you, O God of this man;

denounce you, the god of these catholic school boys.

Amen.