IT’S A PARTY!

John 2:1-11, 2nd Sunday after Epiphany, January 16, 2022

I REMEMBER PLANNING MY OWN WEDDING; WE WANTED IT SIMPLE, AFTER ALL WE WERE NOT SPRING CHICKENS, SETTING UP THIS DAY THAT SEEMS TO BE IN THE MIND OF SO MANY YOUNG GIRLS. BEEN THERE DONE THAT, BUT WE WANTED IT TO BE FUN AND SPECIAL AND BE A PARTY. RIGHT AFTER THE CEREMONY WHICH INCLUDED A LOT OF COLLEGE STUDENTS AND A FEW OLDER FRIENDS AND DOUG TWIN WE HEADED TO THE LOCAL WINE BAR. WE HAD WINE AND CHEESE AND CUPCAKES. IT WAS A PARTY.

 TODAY WE GET TO TAG ALONG WITH JESUS AND HIS MOM TO A WEDDING IN CANA OF GALILEE. IF WE WERE TO TALK TO A 1ST CENTURY WEDDING PLANNER WE WOULD LEARN THAT THESE 1ST CENTURY WEDDINGS COULD BE QUITE EXTRAVAGANT….AS CAN TODAYS! NOT ONLY WERE FAMILY THERE BUT THE WHOLE COMMUNITY WOULD BE INVITED AND WHEN THE ACTUAL CEREMONY WAS OVER THERE MIGHT BE AN ENTIRE WEEK OF FEASTING AND PARTYING. CAN YOU IMAGINE? AT THIS WEDDING FEAST JESUS IS A GUES AND HIS MOM NOTICES THAT THE WINE HAS RUN OUT. WE KNOW FROM OUR 1ST CENTURY WEDDING PLANNER, TO RUN OUT OF WINE WOULD BRING ABOUT SO MUCH SHAME ON THE HOST FAMILY…..WE FELT THAT WAY AT OUR RECEPTION! DID WE PLAN FOR ENCOUGH WINE WITHOUT HAVING TOO MUCH? AFTER ALL, I’M A PASTOR! SO MARY BUGS JESUS TO DO SOMETHING, HE SAYS “DON’T WORRY ABOUT IT, NOT MY TIME” (A LITTLE BIT OF A CODE FOR I’M NOT READY TO DO THE BIG STUFF YET MOM) AND SHE KEEPS AT IT AND WE HAVE TO TRUST THAT THE WRITER OF JOHN AND GOD WERE MAKING A POINT SO JESUS RELENTS.

 HE SEES 6 STONE WATER JARS THAT COULD HOLD 30 GALLONS EACH….THESE WERE JARS THAT WERE USED FOR RITUAL PURITY AND HE TELLS THE SERVANTS TO FILL THE JUGS WITH WATER AND TAKE A BIT TO THE CHIEF “WINE” STEWARD WHO TASTES THE “H2O” AND WITH A LITTLE GLASS SWIRLING AND A SNIFF, THINKS IT IS THE BEST WINE EVER…..HE PULLS ASIDE THE BRIDEGROOM AND COMMENTS THAT THIS IS THE KIND OF WINE YOU PUT OUT AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PARTY NOT THE END WHEN FOLKS HAVE BEEN DRINKING FOR AWHILE. GOOD ONE JESUS, NOT JUST ANY WINE BUT THE GOOD STUFF.

 WE ARE TOLD THAT THIS IS JESUS FIRST SIGN AND THAT HE REVEALED HIS GLORY AND THE DISCIPLES BELIEVED IN HIM…..ALL BECAUSE OF WINE. THIS WAS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE FIRST OF 7 SIGNS JESUS DID, IN THE OTHER GOSPELS THEY WERE OFTEN CALLED MIRACLES. WHY DID JOHN CALL THEM A SIGN? MAYBE BECAUSE THEY POINT TO SOMETHING BEYOND OR MORE….LIKE SIGNS DO!

 IN THE FIRST CHAPTER OF JOHN WE HEAR, *“AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND LIVED AMONG US AND WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY, THE GLORY OF A FATHERS ONLY SON, FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH AND……….. THEN FROM HIS FULLNESS WE HAVE ALL RECEIVED GRACE UPON GRACE. “* ACCORDING TO A NUMBER OF WRITERS *GRACE*, ABUNDANT GRACE IS A CHARACTERISTIC OF JESUS. AS METHODIST WE WOULD AGREE AND WOULD GO SO FAR AS TO SAY THAT ITS ALL ABOUT GRACE. SOME WOULD SAY THAT THE REST OF JOHN IS ABOUT SHOWING THE READER WHAT GRACE LOOKS LIKE, TASTES LIKE, SMELLS LIKE, SOUNDS LIKE AND FEELS LIKE. WHAT IT FEELS LIKE IN THIS PASSAGE, AT THE WEDDING OF CANA IT IS AN EXCESS OF THE BEST WINE WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT.

 WHAT REALLY STICKS OUT FOR ME IS THE IDEA THAT THIS ABUDANCE, THIS GRACE, THIS GENEROSITY OF GOD, THRU JESUS COMES ABOUT IN A VERY ORDINARY PLACE, IN AN ORDINARY EVENT, AT A WEDDING. IT JUST MIGHT BE A CLUE FOR US THAT GOD’S GRACE OCCURS IN THE MIDST OF OUR ORDINARY LIVES, OUR ORDINARY RELATIONSHIPS, OUR ORDINARY RITUALS….IT HAPPENS WHERE WE LIVE.

 THIS SCRIPTURE IS SO RICH THAT I WANT TO POINT OUT A FEW THINGS THAT STRUCK ME AND SOME OF THE IDEAS CAME FROM A GREAT LUTHERAN PREACHER’S PODCAST.

1. IN THIS TEXT WE GET A GLIMPS OF THE NOTION THAT GOD WANTS GOOD THINGS FOR US AND WANTS US TO BE HAPPY AND CONTENT. CAN YOU EVEN IMAGINE THAT? WE DON’T OFTEN BELIEVE THAT ABOUT GOD AND WE WILL TALK ABOUT THAT A LITTLE MORE LATER….. WE SEE GOD’S INTENTION TO BE GENEROUS THRU THE GENEROSITY OF JESUS AT THIS WEDDING BY HIS SUPPLYING THE WINE. HE WAS JUST A GUEST, BUT HE KNEW THE HOST WOULD BE EMBARASSED ABOUT RUNNING OUT OF WINE AND SO JESUS WAS GRACIOUS. SOME COMMENTATORS WOULD SAY THOSE SIX 30 GALLON JUGS WOULD AMOUNT TO 1000 BOTTLES OF THE BEST WINE TODAY. WOW!!!
2. I BELIEVE WE MIGHT ALSO SEE HERE THAT THE BRIDE AND GROOM ARE UNKNOWNS…..NORMAL FOLKS BECAUSE THE STORY DOESN’T GIVE US ANY DETAILS. THEY WERE NOTHING FANCY BUT JESUS OFFERS ABUNDANCE AND GENEROSITY NO MATTER WHO WE ARE. HIS GRACE UPON GRACE IS NOT JUST FOR A SELECT FEW BUT FOR ALL.
3. FROM THE SCRIPTURE WE READ TODAY WE MIGHT ASSUME THAT NO ONE BUT HIS MOM AND THE SERVANTS KNEW WHAT JESUS DID. HE DIDN’T GRAB THE WEDDING MICROPHONE AND MAKE A TOAST TO THE FAMILY WITH THIS GREAT WINE THAT JUST APPEARED. MAYBE THIS INDICATES THAT SOMETIMES JESUS GENEROSITY, JESUS’ GRACE IS A LITTLE UNDER THE RADAR AND WE MIGHT NOT SEE IT BECAUSE WE AREN’T LOOKING FOR IT.
4. LAST THING, JESUS DIDN’T GO TO THE NEIGHBORS VINEYARD, HE USED WHAT WAS AT HAND TO SHARE HIS ABUNDANCE. MAYBE THIS MEANS THAT JESUS CAN USE WHATEVER IS AT HAND TO CREATE ABUNDANCE FOR US AND MAYBE IT ALSO MEANS ABUNDANCE IS RIGHT HERE, RIGHT IN OUR OWN HOUSE, OUR OWN NEIGHBORHOOD, OUR OWN CHURCH.

I AM FASCINATED THAT THIS IS JESUS’ FIRST SIGN, HIS FIRST MIRACLE. WHY DIDN’T HE HEAL THE SICK, RAISE THE DEAD, FIRST? IT WOULD HAVE MADE A BIGGER SPLASH DON’T YOU THINK? WINE DOESN’T SEEM THAT BIG A DEAL….UNLESS IT IS GOOD WINE OF COURSE. MAYBE IT SIGNALS TO US SOMETHING ABOUT THE NATURE OF GOD AND GOD WANTS US TO KNOW GODSELF THRU THIS REVEALING OF HIS SON. FRIENDS, HOW WE VIEW GOD COLORS EVERYTHING WE SAY AND DO. IF WE BELIEVE GOD IS A VENGEFUL, JUDGEMENTAL, STINGY GOD, THAT IS HOW WE LIVE OUR LIVES. IT IS HOW WE DO CHURCH, IT IS HOW WE TALK ABOUT SIN AND HELL AND WHAT IS MINE AND WHO DESERVES WHAT, WHO IS IN AND WHO IS OUT.

 I’VE HAD THE WONDERFUL EXPERIENCE OF PUTTING TOGETHER A GROUP OF FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS AT MY OLD COLLEGE FOR A WEEKLY STUDY. IT TOOK ME THREE YEARS OF MEETING ONE ON ONE WITH FOLKS TO CONVINCE THEM I WAS A SAFE PERSON AND THAT MAYBE THERE WERE OTHER PEERS WHO WERE SAFE PEOPLE OF FAITH. YOU SEE, EACH AND EVERYONE OF THEM HAD THE EXPERIENCE OF CHURCH WHERE GOD WAS EXCLUDING, VENGEFUL, HURTFUL, JUDGMENTAL. AND EVEN THOUGH THEY WANTED TO BELIEVE THEY JUST COULDN’T. WELL A FEW WEEKS AGO ONE OF THE FACULTY MEMBERS REACHED OUT TO ALL THE FOLKS IN THIS GROUP AND ASKED IF WE WANTED TO DO A ZOOM STUDY ON RACHEAL HELD EVANS BOOK WHOLE HEARTED FAITH WHICH IS ABOUT HER STRUGGLES WITH JUST SUCH A RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND. WE STARTED THIS STUDY TWO WEEKS AGO AND MY HEART WAS SO TOUCHED BY THESE WOMEN WHO COULD TALK ABOUT THEIR FAITH WHO COULD ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THEY DIDN’T BELIEVE IN A VENGEFUL GOD BUT HAD FOUND A GOD WHO IS GENEROUS AND LOVING. MY TIME AT DICKINSON WOULD HAVE BEEN WORTH IT FOR JUST THESE WOMEN.

 IN THIS WEDDING AT CANA, WE SEE A LOVING, JOYOUS, GENEROUS GOD WHO IS INTERESTED IN THE REGULAR STUFF OF LIFE; WEDDINGS, SHAME, EMBARASSMENT, MOMS, NEIGHBORS, WATER, WINE, PARTIES.

 I WANT US TO THINK ABOUT WHAT THAT LOOKS LIKE IN OUR OWN LIVES. WHERE DOES GOD WANT TO COME IN AND SAY “HEY, IT’S A PARTY”? WHERE IS THAT JOY, THAT ABUNDANCE, THAT GRACE UPON GRACE IN YOUR OWN LIFE? I KNOW THESE LAST FEW YEARS HAVE BEEN HARD AND I HEAR FOLKS SAY ALL THE TIME, “*I JUST WANT IT TO BE OVER WITH”, I JUST WANT TO MOVE ON WITH LIFE…….I JUST WANT TO GET BACK TO ALL THE REGULAR THINGS OF LIFE*.” BUT WHAT IF JESUS HAS BEEN AT WORK ALL ALONG BEING GENEROUS, LOVEING, GIVING US ABUNDANCE IN ALL THE REGULAR MOMENTS OF LIFE AND WE’VE MISSED IT? WE’VE MISSED IT BECAUSE WE WERE PREOCUPPIED WITH WHAT WE DIDN’T HAVE, WHAT WE LOST, WHAT WE WANT.

AND I AM WONDERING WHEN THINGS OPEN BACK UP…..WILL WE FORGET IN THOSE EVERY DAY MOMENTS OF BBQ’S, PARTYS, WEDDINGS, CELEBRATIONS THAT THE GOD OF GENEROSITY IS THERE, THE GOD OF GRACE UPON GRACE, THE GOD OF ABUNDANCE?

 GOD’S GRACE IS HERE, RIGHT NOW, GRACE UPON GRACE, GENEROSITY AND ABUNDANCE. EACH DAY, IT’S A PARTY! I DON’T WANT TO MISS A MOMENT OF HIS GRACE!