

I've had the joy of thinking about weddings a lot over the last couple of weeks because Mike and I just celebrated our fifth wedding anniversary last week. I remember leaning on God in a lot of different ways leading up to and during that wedding planning process. Everything seemed to be happening all at once during that time - I was in seminary going to school full time, working a 30 hour/week retail job, finished a very intense hospital chaplain internship over the summer, and of course, managing all the details and events that go into planning a wedding. While I was filled with joy to be marrying Mike and have this wonderful day of celebration, I was also filled with stress and overwhelm and did not always have the mental and emotional bandwidth to enjoy the process. Everyone talks about the joys of wedding celebrations, and they are super fun, to be sure, but no one really talks about the behind the scenes stress of them. And then we often feel guilty when we're stressed and not enjoying every single moment of this long-awaited process and day.

In moments when unforeseen stress or guilt or anxiety show up, it is such a comfort to know God is with us in real, tangible ways. God is with us in the joy, and God is with us in the overwhelm. God shows up in delightful ways like the sweet evening of putting together wedding invitations by the light of the Christmas tree in the midst of our wedding chaos, and the stories shared and formed with our bridesmaids and groomsmen. God shows up in the reminders that it's about love, it's about people, it's about the new life you are building together, rather than if the bulletins are the exact shade of lavender I envisioned or how the candelabras are arranged at the church. Weddings, as a celebration of love, are rooted in the people who make their vows and the ones who surround them in joy and love.

And so the signs that Jesus performs, and indeed all of Jesus' ministry, is at its root, about people. About relationships, life together as beloved community, and God's promised commitment to humanity, all the way to the cross and back in life again.

The wedding at Cana, where Jesus turned gallons of water into wine, is the first miracle, or sign, that Jesus provides in the Gospel of John. The stories

that come before this sign are the stories of Jesus' first disciples joining him in ministry. They decided to follow Jesus of their own accord, being actively called by the spirit and deeply believing that Jesus was the Messiah, the promised Savior, and worthy of their faith and life and calling. But this was the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry, so many people still had questions about Jesus - who he was and if he really was the Messiah, and how could they know for sure? Who is this person, who is the Son of God, the Lamb of God, the Rabbi (or teacher) for all people?

Something we do know about Jesus even from the beginning of this story - is that he is part of a community. He is close with family and friends and has come together with his beloveds to celebrate a wedding, a joyful occasion. The first words that are spoken in this story are from Mary, Jesus' mother. She informs him that they are out of wine, knowing that Jesus, in his divine power, could do something about it. Jesus is surprised that Mary suggests this, that he could take divine action, and basically tells her "no, not yet!". But Mary encourages Jesus to go ahead with what he could do, turn water into wine to continue the wedding celebration, and told the staff to help him out. Then Jesus acquiesces, okay, okay, and after the staff fill up the water jars, he invites them to draw out a cup and give it to the person financing the wedding celebration, the steward.

The steward is amazed at what had happened because this was some really good wine that Jesus created. He thinks the groom has been holding out the good wine, and is frustrated. But Jesus didn't just make good wine to show off to the steward. Jesus showed his divine power in this way because it was the workers and his disciples who came to believe in who he was from this action. The works of Jesus are always good, and for all people, not just the wealthy or powerful or those who are at the center of attention. Jesus welcomes in and loves all people in his body in the world. Jesus intentionally reaches out to those who are on the fringes of society and most in need of the reminders of goodness and love. We are worthy of love and welcomed into the beloved community of Christ's body, no matter what. No matter who we are or where we come from or any human-constructed thing, we are first and foremost a beloved child of God,

for whom Jesus died and rose again. We are loved because we are human, and Jesus, in his signs and ministry, put that love of God into action.

These actions are called signs in the Gospel of John to give us a clearer understanding of the actions of Jesus. They are not called miracles in this Gospel, but signs, because the signs are meant to point to a deeper truth about God, and about Christ himself. Jesus did not come to earth simply to provide us with more wine, the action is not the depth and life-saving truth itself. But seeing Jesus perform something extraordinary, in the midst of a joyful celebration, is rather a sign that points to God being with us in every time and place. We cannot forget that God is with us in the joyful moments of being human. The joy we find in love, in celebration, in being part of a community together is certainly blessed by God, and God delights in our genuine joy.

Jesus performs seven signs throughout the Gospel of John - seven is the biblical number of completion, of perfection, of wholeness - after the seven days of creation (which, friendly reminder, include an entire day of rest, dear friends). These seven signs give us this whole picture of Jesus' ministry, life, death, and resurrection, and the enduring power of the new life we gain as the body of Christ in the world.

Just as the wedding itself is only an early chapter in the great story of a (hopefully long and happy) married life together, so Jesus' signs are only one early action in the great story of his ministry with and for us. I pray that we will be inspired and encouraged by this truth - that the whole of our story of faith and life is more than the sum of its parts. Some of these signs of Jesus were in the midst of joy, like the wine at the wedding of Cana, and some were in the midst of great pain, like Jesus' healing of people who are sick and dying. Throughout the highs and lows, ups and downs, mundane and extraordinary, God is with us in the journey. Jesus knows what it is to live in this beautiful, broken, human world, and walks with us every step of the way. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are united as one body, one communion of saints in beloved relationship together with Christ, and for

this love and relationship, we give unending thanks and praise. Thanks be to God, Amen.