

Deacon David Olsen

St. James Cathedral

2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C

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This year we begin Ordinary Season with St. John's account of Jesus' first sign, the changing of water into wine. It's a very appropriate place for us to begin as it is such an ordinary story. It takes place at an ordinary event, a wedding; in an ordinary village, Cana; among people that are so ordinary and seemingly insignificant that they are unnamed. Even the Virgin Mary is simply called "the mother of Jesus." And Jesus himself doesn't seem to do anything spectacular or out of the ordinary for this miracle to occur. There is no praying; no passing of His hands over the water; the heavens do not open; no whirlwind or clap of thunder. And yet, into this most ordinary of events, something extraordinary happens, plain water becomes choice wine.

In reading John's gospel nothing is as simple as it appears on the surface, and the miracle at Cana is no exception. There are many different levels on which we can read this story, but most intriguing to me is that Jesus, who could have easily worked this simple miracle on His own, chose to include others. Jesus invited the ordinary, unnamed people to be a vital part of His kingdom on earth. Jesus chooses to make the insignificant, significant; the ordinary, extraordinary.

And so, we can't ignore Mary's presence at the wedding, since in many ways; she is the driving force behind this first miracle. It is she who notices the lack of wine and understands the potential distress and embarrassment that it would bring to the newlyweds. Taking this need to Jesus' attention, Mary, the first disciple, becomes our role model. All of us are called to be vigilant in keeping our eyes open to the needs of those around us. Those needs might be as small and common as a dry coat, a warm blanket or a hot meal. It might be someone seeking a compassionate ear or an attentive

gaze. Or those needs might be huge and catastrophic, such as the devastating earthquake in Haiti. As the fourth poorest country in the world, Haiti has long been a place of need, where upwards of 80% of the population lives under the oppressive burden of poverty and insignificance. Mary's example calls us, the ordinary, to become the extraordinary by making the insignificant people of the world, significant. As a parishioner recently wrote in a prayer, "Let me be the eyes/ that see the pain they see." The plight of the Haitian people needs to be seen around the world, and it is our responsibility to make it known.

Next, after bringing the lack of wine, and the need, to Jesus' attention, Mary, speaking to the servants, utters her last words recorded in scripture, and some of the most difficult we will ever hear spoken to us, "Do whatever He tells you." To take part in the miracle of the new wine, we must carry out our part by being obedient to God's call in our lives; to follow His will wherever it leads us. The servants in our gospel today accomplish just that, and they achieve it in grand fashion by filling six stone jars, not half or three-quarters full, but all the way to the brim. God wants all of our hearts and all of our service, not just part. Over my years I have known many people who have made serving the needs of the poor in Haiti their life's work, bringing to them not only the ordinary water, but also the extraordinary, for as Jesus said, "If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me; whoever believes in me, let them drink." As we offer ourselves to do His will, the fuller we fill the jars; the more people will be able to drink of the new wine.

One moment; ordinary water is poured into jars, the next moment; extraordinary, life-giving wine is drawn out. Jesus then grants us the joy and privilege of dispensing this new miracle of life and love. But we are not all called in the same way. In his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul reminds us that we all have different gifts given to us by the same Spirit, different forms of service, but the same Lord. Some of us will dispense this new extraordinary wine through our gift of wisdom, or faith; others through deeds, or healing.

Whatever our gift, we are called upon to use it to its fullest to bring God's extraordinary new wine to all.

Jesus did not need anyone's help to make His simple sign at Cana happen, but He chose humanity, the ordinary, to be part of the miracle; which brings to mind a story of a doctor who many years ago, fresh out of med school, moved his family to a small farming town north of Seattle. He setup practice and a few months later delivered his first baby; which of course was me. I grew up with his children, and my children grew up with his grandchildren. From his very early years, he saw the poverty and desperation of the Haitian people. He made countless mission trips with the Haiti Medical Team throughout his entire career and well into his retirement. Using his gift of healing, he gave completely of himself to a people that the world saw as insignificant. He died a couple of years ago, but his passion for Haiti lives on in his granddaughter, Katie, whose gift is not healing, but tongues. Fluent in French and Creole, she moved to Haiti last September to teach English to the Haitian children, which is where she was when the building collapsed upon her last week, crushing her legs and chest, and bruising her lungs. Fortunately, after three hours, she was dug from the rubble and is now recovering in a hospital in Florida.

Many however have not been so fortunate, and all of us have seen the pictures of the horrendous devastation, death, and need. Like Mary, the Church is telling us: "Do whatever Jesus tells you," and asking us to respond by filling the jars to the brim with our liquid assets, to fill the collection baskets to overflowing. Today, instead of our regular St. Vincent de Paul collection after Mass, we will be taking a collection for the Catholic Relief Service's efforts in Haiti. This is our opportunity to make an ordinary collection of money, extraordinary, so that it can be transformed into a miracle that will bring hope and significance to a devastated people.