

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
January 20, 2013  
Second Sunday after the Epiphany  
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Isaiah 62:1-5  
Psalm 96  
I Corinthians 12:1-11  
John 2:1-11

There is an old, tired cliché that says: *timing is everything*. Whether it is telling a joke, making a dramatic entrance in a play, investing in the market, or popping the question to the love of your life, timing is indeed everything.

When the timing is right, people laugh at your joke, gasp at your grand entrance, or smile radiantly in response to your proposal. But when the timing is off, they are just as likely to gasp at your joke, smile at your entrance, or laugh at your proposal. Timing is everything.

Our Gospel lesson today takes us to a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and to a situation of really bad timing. The timing is all wrong.

The NLT tells us that “the next day” Jesus’ mother was a guest at a wedding, but in the original and in most translations the phrase is “on the *third* day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee.” This phrase, “the third day,” is always used in John’s Gospel to refer to Jesus’ resurrection. For example, a little later in this chapter, Jesus says, “destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn. 2:19-20).

Another scholar I read this week believes that the reference here is to the third day of the wedding celebration. Remember, in that day, weddings typically lasted for a whole week. The ceremony was followed by several days of merriment, dancing, eating, and partying. So it could be that as the wedding party goes deep into its third day, we get this occurrence of really bad timing.

Either way, the wine runs out way too early. Now if this were us, we might whisper nervously to some friends and ask them to make a quick trip to Albertsons to pick up some more. But in the situation here in the text, running out of wine is not merely a little embarrassing. *It's a disaster.* Wine isn't just a social lubricant. Wine is a sign of the harvest, of God's abundance, of joy and gladness and hospitality. *To run short of wine is to run short of God's blessing.* And here at Cana, the wine has run out before the wedding has. It's a catastrophe. Timing is everything.

To make matters worse, Jesus' mother doesn't seem to have much of a sense of timing, either. At least that's what Jesus seems to think. She says to him, "the wine has run out." Maybe she was really close to this family and doesn't want them to be embarrassed. We aren't sure. But it is clear that she expects Jesus to do something about the situation.

But Jesus seems to think that this is another instance of bad timing. He says to her: "How does that concern you and me? My time [hour] has not yet come."

This phrase “how does that concern you and me?” has bothered and perplexed me ever since we had to translate it in our beginning Greek class in college. It’s a very cryptic phrase in the Greek, very hard to pin down. Literally translated, the phrase is “what [is that] to me and to you?”

*[Note: The following matter is parenthetical and will be discussed in the Afterword.]*

If you dig further, you discover that this phrase is an idiom that often expresses harsh rejection and detachment. In its purest form, perhaps the closest we can get to the spirit of it is to translate it: *Who the hell are you?* Or perhaps the phrase, *What the hell?* which has become commonplace in our social media, might be close.

This phrase shows up in several places in Scripture. For example, in I Kings 17, there is a widow woman whose son has died. When Elijah the prophet shows up-- whom this woman believes is responsible for her son’s death -- she greets Elijah with this phrase. Translators render her question, “what do you have against me, man of God?” Another way to render it might be: “What the hell did I do to you, preacher? My son is dead!”

When Jesus says, “my hour has not yet come,” however, that is a little easier to understand. The phrase, “my hour has not yet come,” is used several times in John, and it *always* refers to Jesus’ death and resurrection.

So it would seem that Jesus thinks his mother has a case of bad timing also. As if she is asking him to do something at the beginning of his ministry that is better expressed at the *end or consummation* of his ministry.

Timing is everything, not just here at the wedding in Cana, but throughout John’s Gospel. In fact, there are two kinds of time that interest John. One is the kind of time by which we track and count the everyday events of our lives. It’s the time that is measured in minutes and seconds, hours and days. The time we spend

standing in lines, or punching the time clock at work, or waiting at a stoplight. The Greek word is *chronos*, from which we get our English *chronology*.

But John speaks of another kind of time, a time where all that is predictable fades away and in its place comes sheer possibility. This is God's time, time that punctures through the ordinary moments of our lives at unexpected intervals to reveal a glimpse of the divine. The Greek word is *kairos*, and it signals these unique and pivotal moments around which our *chronos* time spins and turns.

So when Jesus says, "my time has not yet come," he's not talking about a date marked out on a calendar. He's talking about the time when God's glory will be revealed in him through the cross, resurrection, and ascension. The time when God will be accessible to all, once and for all.

That decisive, pivotal time, says Jesus to his mother, has not yet come.

Or has it?

Maybe Mary knows how to tell time better than Jesus thinks. Mary seems to know what "time" it is better than anyone else. For she not only believes that Jesus *can* do something about this disastrous loss of blessing, she *expects* him to. And John seems to agree. (Remember, it's the "third day," the day Jesus was raised from the dead). For wherever there is need and Jesus is on the scene, resurrection and abundance are right around the corner.

And you know what happens. And once again, timing is an issue. If a typical wedding celebration lasted a week, most hosts would serve the best wine up front, wanting to make a good impression. The cheap booze would be reserved for later, when the palettes of the guests have been, shall we say, sufficiently dulled so as not to recognize the drop in quality.

But this host has thumbed his nose at traditional timing and saved the best wine for last. And suddenly this couple has six huge basins of fantastic wine, more than enough for several more days of celebration. No one can now leave this wedding thirsty, for abundance and blessing are overflowing.

On this second Sunday after the Epiphany, I need to ask you a question. The question: *How are you at telling time?*

Do your days pass you by as an increasing stream of appointments, assignments, and tasks? Do you sometimes feel lost in the shuffle of doctor's appointments, grocery shopping, cleaning, helping the kids with homework, and getting the car to the mechanic? Do you sometimes feel like a hamster, spinning in the chronology of your life?

Then let me ask you this: *How would we look at all the ordinary, mundane elements of our lives if we believed God was truly with us?* Let me ask it another way: How would we look at the ordinary, mundane elements of our lives if we believed that Christmas was real? What if God's *kairos* has invaded our *chronos*?

If Mary and John are correct, then whatever time you may think it is in your life, it is also *God's* time. And as we learn at Cana, when God is around, *all* things are possible.

I found a short poem about Jesus' ministry at this wedding in Cana this week. It goes like this:

I saw you leisurely hanging out on a couch,  
laughing at a joke the best man told,  
when your mother interrupted  
and whispered something in your ear.  
You were reluctant,  
but she was persistent.  
And you transformed water into wine.  
And you blessed the party.  
And you made the wedding guests happy.  
And you kept the celebration going,  
not just for a week,  
or for a year,  
but for a lifetime-  
A panoramic vision of blessing  
stretching from Cana to kingdom come. (Rick Fry, *From Cana to Kingdom Come*. Wordpress.com, 1/ 17, 2013)

Timing is everything. And it's time now to come to the Lord's table. Come with faith. Receive grace from the One who not only blessed this celebration at Cana, but who stands ready to bless you, right here, right now.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[With thanks to Dr. David Lose, *Workingpreacher.org*, for many of the insights of this sermon].