



“Keeping the Party Going!”

Psalm 36:5-10

John 2:1-12

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Jesus probably had something in mind for the beginning of his ministry. Maybe it was supposed to be a healing or an exorcism, or a resurrection. Maybe a really good sermon. Something that would make a statement, reveal his compassion and glory and divinity...Unlikely that it would be supplying the booze for a party!

Beginnings are important. When we start projects, enter new relationships, or land a job, we make plans to help beginnings go smoothly. Beginnings are also risky. They reveal what work lies ahead, and sometimes, that work is overwhelming. In scripture we find many beginnings. There's the grand beginnings of creation, small beginnings as family forms, risky beginnings of freedom, corrupt beginnings as kings take power, and unusual beginnings of birth in a stable. God shapes these beginnings to show us what work lies ahead of us in our lives as disciples.

In our story today, we are at a wedding. Weddings in Jesus' day were followed by a seven-day wedding feast at the groom's home. An event like that takes serious planning! It's one thing for us to plan a ceremony and a four hour reception at a local reception venue...but a 7 day feast in your home? Surely there were lists, and delegating, and food sampling, and decorating-all to mark the new beginning of this couple's life together. Sometimes all this work starts to seem ridiculous-but I think the reason behind the madness is that on the wedding day, we hope to frame what life might be like going forward- We want to be surrounded by our loved ones, we want to enjoy ourselves, and we want good food and drink. But in such detailed plans, something is almost always forgotten. Surely you know a good wedding mishap story. Right before my wedding, my sister temporarily lost her shoes-I was all about going barefoot if we had too, but at the last moment, they were in the trunk of the car. At the wedding in Cana, it was the wine. There just wasn't enough. Maybe it was those 12 full grown men Jesus brought with him who guzzled it all down. No bride and groom (or their family who paid for the party) wants the embarrassment of not having enough. Yet in the wedding of this unknown couple, God is shaping the beginning of Jesus' ministry-and it will be a party that does not disappoint!

Each January, we celebrate the beginnings of Martin Luther King Junior's life around his birthday weekend. Tomorrow, as you know, is Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Nationally we celebrate with a day off of work and school. In hopes of shaping a beginning that honors Dr. King's legacy, many will be celebrating with a day ON. Tomorrow, some of the youth will head to a neighborhood in Oakhurst and spend their day doing yard work for folks who can't keep up with their yards anymore. It's a nice and neat celebration of a life and legacy that was not neat at all-Dr. King's life was filled with constant challenges, changes in plans, and often violent interruptions. We've all heard his famous "I have a

dream” speech. But did you know that this speech almost didn’t happen as we know it? Watch now for a quick history lesson:

<http://www.history.com/topics/black-history/martin-luther-king-jr/videos/bet-you-didnt-know-march-on-washington?m=528e394da93ae&s=undefined&f=1&free=false>

Sometimes in the midst of our own plans for beginnings, a voice interrupts.

Those gathered on the National Mall on August 28, 1963 were enjoying a fine speech, as planned. The first seven paragraphs or so weren’t bad by any means-but Gospel singer Mahalia Jackson spoke up and called attention to something she thought people needed to hear. Mahalia was a trusted friend to Dr. King, and often sang at his rallies and events. Dr. King used to call her on bad days, and she would sing him encouragement. Out of his community of faithful friends and family, a voice spoke to him and changed this beginning. “Tell them about the dream, Martin!” I have a feeling that the Spirit had a hand in this one. As told by witnesses at the speech, Martin turned to look at Mahalia, then pushed aside his prepared remarks and told them about that dream.

In our scripture today, Jesus and his buddies are enjoying a perfectly good wedding, when his annoying mother leans over and whispers, “psst. Jesus. They have no wine.” I can just feel Jesus’ eye roll radiating from this text. “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” But Mary won’t let up. She ignores that major eye roll and says to the servants, “do whatever he tells you.” We can’t know if Mary was simply prompting Jesus to fix a problem or get a move on starting his ministry. Either way, does the son of God want to show off his first miracle because his mom told him to? But it seems that there is no better time than the present to begin the work of God, with no better urging than the woman who loves him the most, so maybe with a sigh, Jesus turns to the servants.

When our plans are interrupted by God’s beginnings, the real work begins.

Jesus says, *‘Fill the jars with water.’*

God’s beginnings are taking shape through the busy and faithful hands of the servants. And as you saw in the children’s sermon, that’s some hard work! Jesus doesn’t go to the market and bring back barrels to share, he doesn’t make a dramatic scene of transformation, he doesn’t even touch the water. He simply guides the servants in their work. As we know from other stories of Jesus’ ministry, he was a hands on guy, spending life with the most undesirables of society, touching the most unclean, but at the same time, he also works to empower his disciples. Up until this point in John, Jesus has been baptized by John, and has collected a raggedy band of disciples to follow him around-but they hadn’t yet seen what Jesus was all about. In this small miracle, the good work of God’s kingdom was revealed-work that is laborious, but leads to great celebration.

That August in Washington D.C., with the outline of Dr. King’s dream, new beginnings were taking shape. Risking a moment in the national spotlight, King whips up the crowd and the country with his dream. While Dr. King’s “I Have A Dream” speech was by no means the beginning of his civil rights leadership, it laid out his hopes for the work that lay ahead. When he set aside his prepared words for

the refrain, "I have a dream," the tone of the speech, the historic march, and maybe even the civil rights movement shifted. The work to be done was set in front of them, and with great protest, enormous effort, and thousands of participants, Dr. King's dream started to become a little more like reality.

God's beginnings for Christ's ministry on earth takes place in a community celebrating a marriage. In a setting of joy and an abundance of wine, God shapes this beginning to show us what work lies ahead as disciples of Jesus. In this ministry, we may sometimes be the voice interrupting the perfectly good plans, but are probably more often the servants who faithfully carry out work they know is miraculous. Our Psalmist today spoke of the steadfastness and vastness of God's love. They spoke of how all people may feast on the abundance of God's house and drink from the river of God's delights-For with God is the fountain of life. God, our fountain of life shapes beginnings to fill our jars up to the brims, revealing that the party will keep going.

What story of beginning do you find yourself today? It's a new year for us all, a new job for me, a new partnership between us...Some of you are experiencing new joys, different ways of life in your relationships, or fresh grief. In these new beginnings, what work has God laid out for us?

Whatever God plans for these beginnings, they aren't just a flick of the wrist, they are the labor of the servants filling the stone jars with water, of protestors marching in solidarity, of church school volunteers organizing the next shelf in the resource room. I found this dirt in my robe pocket this morning, and was reminded of God's presence with us in the dirty work of life together. Join in the work of doing God's beginnings, by filling where there is emptiness in whatever way you are led in this community.

My beginnings here are being shaped by the love of God that is being shared in this place. Last Sunday night I was served an abundance of laughter at MSYG. In meeting many of you, I am learning stories of how this place has filled you. I am experiencing the abundance of grace, forgiveness, love, and hopeful expectation that runs through this church. And I am excited to do this work with you! As God provided wine for a wedding, and inspiration for a speech, molded the beginnings of creation, and the beginnings of this year, God will shape this beginning to show us what we need to do.