

## Concerned

John 2: 1-11

[Augsburg University Chapel, 14 January 2022]

Happy New Year, my friends. We come together in these fraught times – these first weeks in the Epiphany season – seeking to discern God’s will for God’s faithful people in the here and now. The poet W.H. Auden, offers, in “For the Time Being,” these remarkable words of wisdom for all of us looking to live as faithful disciples in the time being:

“Well, so that is that.

Now, we must dismantle the tree,

Putting the decorations back into their cardboard boxes—

Some have gotten broken—and carrying them up to the attic...

To those who have seen The Child, however dimly, however incredulously,

The Time Being is, in a sense, the most trying time of all.

For the innocent children who whispered so excitedly

Outside the locked door where they knew the presents to be

Grew up when it was opened...

In the meantime

There are bills to be paid, machines to keep in repair

Irregular verbs to learn, the Time Being to redeem

From insignificance.”

And there is our vocational task – our calling to be discerned – the time being to be redeemed.

This morning, I’d like to suggest that a compelling part of that discernment is what it means to be “concerned” as part of our vocational lives in the world. How is this “C” word – concerned – an important aspect of our “V” word – our vocations?

Let’s begin with the gospel story for this morning, assigned in the lectionary for this next Sunday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> week in Epiphany – this familiar tale of Jesus’s first miracle, labeled “The Wedding at Cana.” As an aside, I visited the purported site of this miracle a few years ago during my trip to Israel and was struck by how out of the way, down narrow alleys, in the midst of an ancient neighborhood, it was. Not a grand place at all, and here was where Jesus’s ministry began.

I’m sure we all recognize the broad outlines of the miracle story. At the beginning, Jesus is with his mother and disciples at the wedding, when the wine gives out. The story ends with this surprising act as Jesus turns water into fine wine.

It's the interactions that happen in the middle of the story that I want to focus on. It's Mary who comes to Jesus with news that the wine has run out. And Jesus's reply is where I want to pause: "Woman, what concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come." Now, I don't know about you, but I've always heard this reply as a rebuke of Mary. Go away, Mom, this is not my problem – I'm all about bigger and better things.

But in an article from a few years back, Jesuit theologian Michael Buckley has suggested that there is a deeper and more nuanced meaning to Jesus's response. Mary does not make a request, she simply states a fact – there is no more wine. Jesus responds with a question that gets at the heart of his entire ministry – Buckley rephrases the response this way: "How do we include essentially within our lives those who we might otherwise forget as we go about the business of our lives." In other words, Jesus is noting in his question the truth that we are inextricably bound up with each other. To be concerned is to be truly human.

And the interesting thing is that Mary seems to get it. Instead of responding with some sort of moral argument for why Jesus should be concerned, she turns to the servants and tells them to do whatever Jesus tells them. She understands that the concern Jesus has for the needs of others demands obedience, not arguments.

And here is the lesson for us in this story – here is the vocational challenge for faithful people. The gift of faith from our gracious God carries with it both Mary's statement that the wine is gone and the response Jesus gave to his mother: "What is this to you and me?"

Again, Buckley challenges us with this lesson for our contemporary lives in the world.

"Those parents who watch their children grow up without education, without much hope for a better life...they have no wine. The millions of aged, hidden away in our cities or in dreadful convalescent homes...they have no wine. The despised or feared or uneducated, whose lives are terrorized by the violence on our streets...they have no wine. Women demeaned and threatened by violence and their disproportionate level of financial insecurity...they have no wine."

And we could go on with the threats against our Muslim neighbors, the systematic racism in our country, the corruption in organizations and countries around the world – they have no wine. To which Jesus calls us to grapple with what concern this is to you and me, to recognize our common human experience, and to get to work as those called to follow him. Obedience, not arguments.

I love how this story is told as the beginning of Jesus's public ministry, because from here – from this claim that being concerned is at the heart of the life of faith – we then are offered lesson after lesson of what Jesus calls us to be and do. We are called to heal

the sick, to free the imprisoned, to feed the hungry, to comfort the heartbroken, to fight for peace and justice for all God's creation.

So, back to our vocational journeys in the world. One the most distressing ways in which the theological concept of vocation has been corrupted in the public discourse is the idea that a calling is simply a personal possession, unencumbered by the demands of others, and always it seems on an upwardly mobile life trajectory.

Well, no... The message we must proclaim for all to hear is your vocation, your calling, is never separated from the needs and aspirations of the communities and organizations and neighborhoods in which we live and work. Our callings are an obedient response to those who have no wine, because we are called to be concerned. No arguments, follow Jesus. We must reclaim the fact that at the core of our lives together in the world, our gracious and loving God intends for us to love each other as God loves us, to be concerned for each other as our God is concerned for us.

And here's the cool thing about all of this as we return to our gospel story. Jesus tells the servants to fill the jars with water, to then draw some out and take it to the chief steward, who then exclaims to the bridegroom: "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." The story ends with this powerful lesson. For those who follow Jesus, for those who are called to be concerned and do God's work in the world, the best, the very best, is yet to come. Thanks be to God. Amen.