

The Right Tools - Searching Out God's Gifts

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Today's story is one of very few in the life of Jesus that centers around his mother, Mary. Just a month ago, we were focused on a teenage girl who, having received a tremendous gift and blessing from God, earned her sainthood in the bearing of Jesus into the world. Today, we recall her some thirty years later. She's less innocent, she's no longer young, she's raised more children, she's maintained all the mothering roles of her station... She's mended skinned knees and guided her children through the process of marriage. By now, at least as far as Jesus goes, she's watched her firstborn son break every single rule established by their religious authority. She has authority in life...for she is a good, loving, strong Jewish woman and mother. And, like other good, loving, strong women and mothers, girl has learned to wield her authority when her son is concerned.

Mary and Jesus have been invited to a wedding celebration. We learn that Mary was there, and that Jesus and his disciples had been invited. Perhaps they didn't know one another would be there, but connected upon arrival. This party has been going on for awhile at the point we enter the story. So long, in fact, that the wine – which would have been abundant for the guests – had totally given out. Mary, recognizing that this celebration of blessing is important to the bride and groom...likely the most important celebration of their lives...goes to Jesus.

She said to Jesus, "They have no wine."

That's all we've got. "They have no wine." Now, if my mother had said that, it might have sounded worried – "They have no wine." Other

mothers who might have sounded accusing, “They have no wine!” Still other mothers might whisper it under their breath in scandal with pointed finger – “THEY have no wine...”

HOW she said it is not in the text...yet we can presume the statement was said with an air of expectation. She says it simply, as a matter of injustice for such a grand occasion. ...And what might have followed in her gaze...unspoken, but palpable and demanding? “Go do something about it!”

Jesus replies to her, “What concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” Jesus doesn’t WANT to fix this problem. Jesus has been gathering disciples up to this point, but his greatest sermons, his public life has not yet been established. He’s not ready. And in her role – her motherly authority, her deep understanding of who Jesus is – simply ignores him.

She ignores his plea and turns to the servants, saying, “Do whatever he tells you.” You know the rest of the story. Jesus has the servants to fill the 150 gallons’ worth of jars with water...and that 150 gallons becomes wine. It’s a miracle. It’s Jesus’ first public miracle. And it was done at the incredible push of a good, loving, strong mama.

This story of Jesus departs from all the other stories we have. In the parables and in the sermons and in the chronology of Jesus’ journeying we find reasons...God’s love, new relationship, overcoming prejudice, reaching across cultural biases...we have established, grace-filled reasons for his work. Now, I’ve heard the arguments analyzing Jesus’ choice of miracle. 150 gallons of wine would surely NOT run out! You’d have to go to a winery to see that much wine collected in 30-gallon vats! Some sermons minimize the amount of the wine, proclaiming

that the great amount was not for drinking, but for the grandiose capability of miracles. Some sermons erase the fermented nature of the wine...for our culture has a LOT of shame about alcohol. If alcohol puts you in dangerous places, by all means avoid it. But shame simply breeds self-hatred and deters us from the journey to salvation – shame is not of God and totally lacks grace. So, if you're resting in that old tape in your head, turn it off for just a few minutes.

Jesus created 150 gallons of wine for a party celebrating the sacred joining of two people beginning a life together. It was a celebration...and one that Jesus participated in. WHAT Jesus created in this miracle is not the important element of the story. THAT he did it at all is a miracle in itself.

How many of you have known someone who is immensely gifted, who has an amazing blessing of God and a calling that pulls at them each and every day? And how many of us have seen that person deny their gift? Minimize it? Refuse to act into it? It's frustrating, isn't it? In fact, it's not only frustrating, it can be utterly maddening to see one so amazingly gifted by God walk away from the very uniqueness that God created in them.

As frustrating as it is for US to see our friends and family shy away from their gifts, imagine what it must be for God. The giver of all grace and giftedness. The bestower of love and life in each of us. The eternal guide along our way into health and wholeness – into salvation. It's a very good thing that God has an eternal source of patience because we are an uncooperative lot!

The truth of the matter is that most of us are guilty of shying away from our giftedness. Those who unabashedly live into their gifts are often the

object of judgment by those who struggle with our gifts. We have a sense that all giftedness must be balanced by humility, but then we proclaim “humility” to be silence or hiddenness. We proclaim any out-and-loud giftedness as prideful. We truly cannot fathom the totality of God’s gifts that we as a human family have squashed with shame.

We truly cannot fathom the number of souls our human family has knocked from the path of God with judgment...including, for some of us...our own.

We need a renewed way of looking at giftedness. It’s our God-given gifts that serve as our tools for finding ourselves in the mystery of Christ. Like a clue along the way as we hunt for Christ in our lives, our gifts help open doors, find new relationships, and spread the love of God with others.

And gifts from God are as diverse as God’s expansive, immeasurable self. Paul says, “...there are a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are a variety of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.”

Take that knowledge seriously. For your gifts are various as well. Like Jesus in his first public miracle...that first outward sign of an inward giftedness...sometimes we need a good, hard push from someone into the light. We need that nudge – full of love and well-meaning – born out of a desire to see us become all God calls us to be. It’s ok to need the nudge...it’s not okay to ignore it.

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Says the Apostle Paul. Some of us can speak, some can sing, some can

write, some can tell stories, some can prophesy...all are gifts of utterance to the glory of God. Some of us can build, others can fix what was built and needs mending. Some work miracles, others heal; some lead and others are gifted followers; some have vision and others make visions reality..."all are activated by one and the same Spirit."

We talk a lot about being a part of the Body of Christ. This month, we are searching ourselves out in the mystery of Christ. Your unique gifts are integral to fulfilling your place in the Body. Christ not only calls you, but Christ needs you.

Can you imagine what your life might be like if the human being Jesus had not listened to his giftedness and lived into it? As a part of the Body of Christ, your giftedness is just as important and necessary. Live into that giftedness in a loud and public way. Allow others to know the gifts in you, to receive the gifts you have to give. God is offering you the grace to take a deep breath and pause...and then that loving mama God is truly following up that pause with a great and almighty and expectant nudge.

Amen.