Second Sunday in Ordinary Time - Cycle C

St. Mary’s in Riverside

This morning

 one of the most familiar stories in the NT

 most often thought of as a wedding story

 which might suggest that it’s a bit out of place

 on this Second Sunday in ordinary time

 when on this Martin Luther King Weekend

 we might have thought the Lectionary

 would have given us beatitudes

 or Jesus taking on the Pharisees

 or his reaching out to a Syro-phoenician woman or

 Samaritan or someone else

 Similarly marginalized by society

 But no ... we get a wedding feast ...

 Puzzling because ever Advent we start anew with a Gospel

 this year cycle C = Luke

 but today’s gospel isn’t from Luke but from John

 a further indication that maybe things aren’t what they seem

maybe not just a wedding story or miracle story

 or Marian injunction to “do whatever he tells you”

To put this context, this week resume Ordinary time

 Christmas season officially ending last week

 Yet since advent, every Sunday has focused on some revelation

 Manifestations in the Baptist and the visitation

 Then nativity, Shepherds, holy family

 Jesus the tween in the temple

 Magi, and last week baptism of Lord

Even though the manifestation cycle is technically over

The epiphanies continue ... now in first miracle

 but what is being revealed?

 just power to change water into wine?

 or something else

Many years ago was introduced to an extended reflection on the story

 by poet - preacher - friend Tom Troeger

 a reflection on what happened **after** the wedding

Tom begins by suggesting that was a lot of wine left over

 Gospel says that there were six stone water jars

 each holding fifteen to twenty-five gallons

 about 120 gallons of wine

 600 bottles

 lot to drink, especially since initial supply already consumed

He writes: *I would like to think that when the couple had left for their honeymoon and guests had departed, some friend bottled the remaining wine, and when the couple returned, presented them with several crates of it.*

 He continues: *I picture the couple delighted, smiling to think that on the meager budget of newlyweds they can enjoy such a heavenly vintage with their low-cost suppers. In the way of eager young couples, they do not plan very well at first so that at the end of two or three years, they realize, extravagant as Jesus was, they will some day run out. So they begin to save the wine for special occasions: anniversaries, on the birth and dedication of a child, at family reunions, and on high holy days.

 every time they taste the wine, they relive their wedding day, and recall how at the first sip of Jesus’ wine they had looked at each other with eyes that shone with a love whose intensity still catches them by surprise.

 The years pass until they are an old couple. Troeger pictures the old couple on a chilly night. She is in front of the fire, trying to warm her always cold feet and hands.

 He pauses coming into the room and studies her in the light of the fire: the shape of her forehead, the deep creases of her face, and the lips he has kissed ten thousand times.

 With a prompting he cannot explain, he suggests, “Honey, what if we finish the Rabbi’s wine tonight. There’s just one little bottle left. It might warm you up some.”

 She smiles and nods, so he fetches the final bottle and brings it back to the fire with the only clean cup he can find. As he uncorks it he wonders aloud if it will still be good, after all these years. She comments, “The rabbi’s wine has never gone bad, It’s as amazing as the way he provided it.”

 He pours the first serving and hands his wife the cup. She sips and hands it back. They look at each other and nod their agreement: as rich as the day they were married.

 They drink very slowly, and as they drink they start to tell stories.
She says: “I remember when Sarah was born. You would have thought nobody had ever been a father before, the way you carried on. You and the neighbors consumed an entire crate of wine that night.”*

 *“Well you did just about the same, when Benjamin and Rebecca brought home our first grandchild,” he said. She laughs heartily, “Those were such good times, good enough to want them never to stop.”

 He pours some more wine, and as they each take a sip she notices he is trying to hold back tears. She knows what he is thinking: remembering when the third child died. Terribly sick. Tried everything. But Micah died anyway. All she could pray for weeks on end was “My God, my God, why have you forsaken us?” Weeks later he came home to supper, and they set the table without saying a word, going through the motions that had become rituals of habit, the only thing holding them together day by day now. When they sat down they realized she had no water from the well and he brought no wine from market. So he got up and found one of the bottles of wine from their wedding. Might as well open it now. No sense saving it for special occasions anymore. So he opened it and when the wine touched their lips they tasted grace in their hearts, and they broke down and sobbed together. The grief of their loss never went away – how could it? – but the strength to carry the grief together that was what the wine of Jesus gave them.

 Now sitting in front of the fire, they look at each other, and she takes his hand saying “Yes, Honey, I know, I know.” He is silent, then holds the bottle upside down over the chalice. There are a few last drops.

 He hands the chalice to her: “Here, you finish it.”

 She takes the smallest sip and hands it back to him, pointing out there is still the tiniest bit at the bottom. He puts the brim to his lips and throws back his head holding the cup straight over him, then slowly brings it down and holds it between them.

 “That’s it,” he says with a voice that sounds both satisfied and sad. “All gone. None to pass on to the children or the grandchildren now. Just the story of our wedding at Cana, and the rabbi who blessed us with wine. Just the story. But no wine.”

 “Not to worry” responds his wife. “Not to worry. As long as people come to his table, there will always be more.”*

What profoundly touches me about this reflection

 Is that throughout the story

in the process of consuming the wine

 again and again the couple becomes disciples of the wine

 telling the story in all of its intoxication and pain

 and so the manifestation continues

and the manifestation is unmasked

 that the change from water to wine

 is not just a miracle of hospitality or graciousness

but also a miracle of commitment ... even when the cup is empty

 and the cupboard run dry

for this early story in John

 this first miracle at Cana

 foreshadows the miracle of Golgotha

 changing water to wine

 is symbolic of the changing of hearts

 culminating in the pouring out of God’s own wine

 in the blood of his Son

 who when hanging on the cross

 eternal wine and water

 flowed form his side

 and the church was born

Some of us might feel as though

 We are still in the first blush of the wedding feast

 With stores of wine and grace

 That will last forever

 Although it won’t

 And some may feel that the cup is already empty

 The vat of wine or grace or love run dry

In the shadow of the Martin Luther King holiday

 I wonder if this civil rights martyr would think

 That in this age ... in this country

 The good wine is gone?

 The storehouse of intoxicating rhetoric

 And the spilling of his own blood ...

 Moving us no further ... than where

That Thursday evening in April of 1968

Yet this feast of manifestation

 Is a an invitation to hope

 For the prophet tells us in the first reading

that we shall not be called forsaken

 Or our land desolate

 But instead called Gods’ delight, the Espoused of Christ

 But only if we are willing

 To drink of the cup

 An New Testament metaphor for pouring ourselves out in service

 To those whose personal, spiritual, emotional, physical

 Vats have gone dry

 And cupboards are bare

In his book *God in the Dock,* C.S. Lewis wrote:

[keyboard, “We Shall Overcome”]

“*God creates the vine and teaches it to draw up water by its roots and, with the aid of the sun, to turn that water into a juice which will ferment and take on certain qualities. Thus every year, from Noah’s time till ours, God turns water into wine*.”

In a similar way

 That baptismal font that graced us with living waters

 also a kind of spiritual wine vat, chalice of blessing and suffering

 The Gethsemane cup - writ large

 That Jesus would not by pass

 But drink deeply

 And then hand it on to us - his espoused, his beloved

 And so water and wine, central to our eucharist celebration

 Is embodied in the sweat and blood of the baptized

 Who take up the mission of the rabbi

 To become disciples of the wine

 For it is only in drinking deeply

 Of the cup of suffering and commitment

 In view of so much blood

 Spilled on the streets of this city

 And around the globe

 That we too, guided by the spirit of dignity and justice,

 We too will overcome someday. Through Christ our Lord