

“Just Show Up”

John 2:1-11

The Rev. Dn. Nancy Casey Fulton

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We’ve just heard the familiar story of an ordinary event, a wedding in Cana, which was about three days’ walk from Nazareth: not too far. Jesus and his disciples were invited to the wedding, perhaps because Cana was also the home of Nathanael, a new disciple. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was also present at the feast, though John does not tell us why.

In those days a wedding feast lasted seven days, with fresh guests arriving each day. John does not say what day the contingent from Nazareth arrived, nor how long the celebration had been going on, but he does tell us that partway into the merriment, the wine ran out. Mary knew something was wrong—perhaps she heard mumbling or saw frantic looks among the serves. She leaned over to her son, a gentle man known for his helpfulness and his quiet presence, and she whispered to him: “they have no wine.”

He says to her: “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.”

His response has always seemed harsh to me, a rude reaction to his beloved mother. I would have rebuked my son, all 36 years and 6 feet of him, if he had spoken to me in that manner. Jesus might indeed have startled his mother, who assumed that he would do her bidding without question, that he would “fix” the situation and bring dignity to the wedding feast before anyone realized that something was amiss.

One commentator suggests that Jesus was not being rude: he was telling his mother that he had to wait until the timing was right for him to intervene.

In any case, she didn't think they could wait: she took charge, telling the servers to "do whatever he tells you." And so Jesus instructed the staff to fill six jugs with water. And when they had filled them, he told them to draw some out and take it to the chief steward. He took a sip, and he marveled at the excellence of the wine: inferior wine, which tasted like vinegar, was usually served last, when the guests were too intoxicated to notice.

Quietly, but with authority, Jesus solved what would have been an embarrassment for the family. And that quiet "helpfulness," at the urging of his mother, was recorded as his first miracle.

"Do whatever he tells you." Mary could not have imagined that her gentle command to her son would thrust him onto the public stage, but Jesus must have known that his life would change dramatically because of his action. Quite soon this man from Galilee would be recognized in some circles as the long-awaited prophet who had come from the Father in heaven. He would become a threat to the Jewish authorities, and he would ultimately place himself in danger.

A commentator in *The Interpreter's Bible* says that "one is glad for Mary's unconscious and instinctive tribute to Jesus. For the silent years are very silent: and the veil that cuts us off from them is tragically thick. . . . but this confidence of Mary in him could have come only out of long experience of one always unselfish and thoughtful and dependable, unfailing and ingenious in helpfulness."

He goes on to note that "apparently no one in his home thought of Jesus as especially religious. . ." and that none of his family or friends joined his movement. His brother James was the devout member of the family: he belonged to an order so strict that the household had to be organized to suit his fasts and devotions. In contrast to his brother, Jesus sought out ordinary people, not the scholars in the synagogues nor the priests in the temple. And the ordinary people were in turn drawn to his quiet

presence. They simply wanted to be near him, to hear him speak of God's kingdom, to feel his compassion.

In the words of William Wordsworth,
*[Jesus] saw into the depth of human souls,
 Souls that appear to have no depth at all
 To careless eyes.*

Jesus saw their depths of pain and hope as they sought a cure from leprosy, paralysis, possession by demons; as they sought incorporation into the society that cast them out because of their ailments. They were drawn to this man who did not demand obedience to his teachings, but who offered himself, his presence and his touch.

Matthew Arnold, nineteenth-century English poet and essayist—known to many for his poem “Dover Beach”—reflected on the miracle at Cana when he wrote about his father's faith. His father, Thomas Arnold, was an Anglican priest and the headmaster of Rugby School, a true reformer in English schools. Matthew says that it was not his father's teaching, but his father's life, “lived day by day beside him, that made him credit the possibility of human goodness on the great scale. . . .” “That is what Christ has done for souls innumerable.”

Our challenge is also to be present with our brothers and sisters: on ordinary days, and in times of stress, illness, and death. I began to learn that lesson through my work as a hospice chaplain, as chaplain to Lynnwood Home, and as deacon of this parish. On many occasions I have been present at difficult times. I have always felt humbled to be there, and I have sometimes felt a little helpless, not knowing what to say. But I have also learned that being there was enough, just as Jesus was present with so many men, women, and children who needed his quiet power.

- Jesus teaches us that we just need to show up quietly, with a gentle touch

- We might gather with others to knit or crochet prayer shawls, which will give comfort to someone down the road
- We can take communion to someone who can no longer make it to church
- We can field phone calls for the Goodrow Fund

We can do what Jesus did if we are willing to be present and to trust that God will take care of the rest.

That, for me, is the miracle at the wedding in Cana: that Jesus is not gone from the world, but present . . . present in us.