

Sunday, January 20, 2019 – Second Sunday after the Epiphany
“Let’s Party!”

John 2: 1-11

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV
Story Interrupted Structure

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

In high society or aristocratic circles it was customary for a young woman, formally now recognized as an adult, and eligible for a suitor to be formally introduced to society at a fancy ball. Hair, makeup, nails all done up and a stunning dress were all par for the course. For the debutante – the young lady making her debut, this was her “coming out party.” She’s on the scene in a public way and it puts everyone on notice – she has arrived. No longer is she at the kids’ table, no longer is she under the radar – she’s out for everyone to see and she is making a very public show of it that none can miss. Her time has come.

Our text has Jesus at a party as well. A wedding reception, specifically. It’s in Cana, of Galilee, north of Jesus’ hometown of Nazareth and about 90 miles north of Jerusalem on the edge of Judea. They’re at an elaborate wedding replete with servants, a sign indicating wealth and extravagance for the occasion. The couple extends an invitation to many to come and celebrate. As a sign of this Jesus and His disciples – newly called as His disciples, at that, not family or friends or even fellow townsfolk of the host – thirteen grown men in all are invited, taking up a proverbial table and a half worth of guests in a 21st century reception. There’s a lot riding on this reception for the bride and groom, providing all the right hospitality to the gathered guests. Jesus’ mother Mary approaches and makes Him aware of a dire situation for the wedding family.

I was at a wedding a couple years ago where the couple had their own dire hosting situation arise. They had a small cake for themselves to share and a separate cake intended for guests. Unfortunately the employees at the reception site went ahead and cut up the guest cake really early in the reception, while appetizers were going around and the cheese tray and fruit tray was out before dinner was even served. Someone came and whispered in my ear, “Oh no, they already cut the cake!” I was sent scrambling out the door, found an open Albertsons and bought the four largest and most semi-respectable looking pre-made cakes they had at the bakery, you know, that weren’t decorated with a frosting made into a football field or Spiderman

or covered in sprinkles, and rushed them back to the reception so that when the couple was ready to cut their cake, the guests could participate by eating dessert. Sadly, the venue employees didn't communicate to each other when I dropped off those cakes with instruction to not cut it until the couple cut their cake... they went ahead and cut them up again. I knew at that very moment that I'd use that story whenever I preached this text – even for all my scrambling, I couldn't save the cake for the right moment. There wasn't enough at the right time to go around.

Mary goes to her son Jesus – there isn't enough wine – a culturally devastating, humiliating situation for the bridegroom. More than the guest list being larger than the supply, the problem is the cultural expectation to be a great host, what it says about you and your generosity.

And for Jesus, His hour has not yet come. The Holy Spirit, like a dove lighted upon Him in His baptism, but he hasn't said anything yet about who He is or why He has come. He has called His disciples to Himself, but He hasn't shown people who He is. No miraculous acts, no signs, no wonders. This may be a fancy wedding but it's supposed to be about celebrating the wedding of this couple in Cana, not about Jesus' coming out party.

See because Jesus knows, more than the miracle of changing water into wine Mary is asking Him to make a statement. This is a miracle that will point to His glory. When He finishes His work and every knee bows and every tongue confesses there will be a feast like none other, of neverending abundance. When He purifies people of their sins, wine will flow freely and there, mysteriously too His blood, under the wine and it will be a great sign.

But then, the same God who breaks into our time period, right where we are and gives us a foretaste of a great feast to come in ridiculous proportions of blessing none of us could ever hope to power through and shows us His glory before that Great Day of His return does the same thing for this wedding reception. Six stone jars – specifically, ceremonial purification jars – that would contain water set aside for Jews to do the right ceremonial washing are ordered filled with water. These aren't little jugs. Each hold two or three metretes. Twenty or thirty gallons. There are about five wine bottles in a gallon, so each jug holds 100 to 150 bottles of wine. Jesus provides 600-900 bottles worth of wine. I know some really rich guys have cellars that large, but I'm guessing none of you. So do you think that'll do it? That's some coming out party.

And let's emphasize party because Jesus wants us to see something about Himself. He's showing His disciples and He's showing you and me just a glimpse, just a taste, just a ray of light of what He has come to do – to purify us through His blood. There's more than enough purification to go around, you'll never run out, it'll never get eaten up and wasted too soon like so much early wedding cake. He is the God of more than enough.

I've had my own moments of scurrying around like Mary or a panicked servant thinking there's not enough, we're going to run out, forgetting who our God is. And it's ridiculous because our congregational giving is healthy, our school enrollment has been steadily increasing, but there are some big ticket things needed, in many ways we're in the best spot, financially speaking that we've been in for at least a decade.

But I want you to know, for over a year now the staff and Board of Directors have been aware of increasingly urgent facility needs around the campus – you may have noticed some of these things yourselves. A year ago we determined that proper stewardship of this facility, this site for God's mission to go forward in Las Vegas, made it incumbent upon us that we set a plan to begin a capital campaign, part of which is geared toward our facility being ready to serve God's mission for the next generation. That was added to our strategic plan for this year. We're in early stages of planning and discussion on how that would start. In the meantime, some of the issues, increasingly serious, can't wait for capital campaign donations to start coming in and that frantic "we don't have enough" voice has popped up in my noggin from time to time when I consider the scope of the issues. I'll share with you the reasons why but let me start by saying this – remember that is a voice sparked by fear, not by trust, and that we have a God of more than enough.

The issue: basically every flooring surface in the building is nearing the end of its' life – our gym floor has been patched and glued down to the concrete underneath half a dozen or more times or more where bubbles keep coming up, the tiles in the hallways are cracking and in some places starting to pull away from the ground, the carpet is worn and pilling. The HVAC that we've been working on for almost a year has constant new gremlins – here's a corroded, leaking pipe from the elementary hallway that carries hot water for our heating system, removed after it sprung a leak right before Christmas break. The elementary playground surface needs to

be replaced. To top it off, our organ, increasingly babied along has about a year, or maybe a little longer, until it will give way. Those are just the mission critical, gotta be done in 2019 things. Various other things, not yet at emergency level will need an overhaul sooner than later, such as our roof, or rearranging our church and school office areas are on the horizon. I haven't even mentioned building out our basement yet – but first, let's steward well what we already have – one step at a time. Moreover, we want to do everything right, with "industry standard" materials and professional installation that will pass the test of time and serve us well into the future. I don't know the whole dollar value of all of this yet or the final scope of the vision but I can promise you it won't be less than \$500,000 and it will probably require our Board approving a loan to begin work even before capital campaign funds start coming in. And I want to say this very clearly – we believe – the executive staff, the Board of Directors, the Elders, strongly, that we can't let facility issues dictate the rest of our mission and moving forward with an associate pastor of discipleship to help us do just that. The building serves God's mission, not the other way around!

While God makes no assurances of financial security for His church or for our individual lives He provides everything that we need to be about His mission. Jesus shows us we have a God of more than enough. When those questions of "will there be enough?" attack me, that promise is my comfort. And I look with great joy to God's gifts – a great leadership team, helping shoulder that responsibility of preparation and planning, a gracious congregation who value God's mission, easy to work with, faithful lenders and campaign planners like LCEF and our Synod at large to partner with, a Business Administrator available to talk with you in the potential of special bequests or legacy planning, not to mention some wise perspective to see that a couple thousand more dollars a month toward our mortgage, which significant is manageable, and will be mitigated by the forthcoming capital campaign.

God's love is radical, ridiculous and radiant. You may not bring enough to the table, like the wedding hosts. You may ask more of God than you have any right to really ask, like Mary. You may sit at the proverbial back table, or the kids' table, or be under the radar and feel unnoticed, unseen or unwelcome. You may wonder where what's needed will be provided from – but the abundance of God's love shown through this sign is inexhaustible love for you and for

me. Your purification through Jesus' blood never runs out. The celebration feast prepared for the very end when Jesus returns never runs out of room. You're invited, wanted, and God will do everything – has done everything – for you – to invite you, purify you, give Himself for you, equip His saints and His church to be about His mission and celebrate with you in the most incredible joy for eternity. Let's party! In Jesus' name, Amen.