



northminster presbyterian church

2400 old alabama road
roswell, georgia 30076

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SCRIPTURE: Isaiah 62:1-5 John 2:1-11

SERMON: Whose Wine Is It Anyway? (Rev. Dr. Jim Simpson)

Whose wine is it anyway? I marvel at the tasting notes that you find on some wine bottles! You know, this sort of thing: "Ripe plum and berry fruit are plentiful with pepper and spice fragrances combined with subtle vanilla and liquorices fruit flavors, supported by chocolate oak influences, this is a typically rich and generous wine." Maybe I get a hint of one of these flavors but not all of them. Back in 2002 a doctoral dissertation entitled "Taste: A Study in the Representation of Chemical Substances in the Arena of Consciousness" presented the findings of a researcher Fredric Brochet who proved that most of what connoisseurs say about wine is well – *humbug!* He did three things: he analyzed the written text of wine reviews, he carried out blind taste tests, he even scanned brains as people tasted wine. And the result was – *humbug!* He did play some dirty tricks on his volunteers. In one tasting, he served a white wine and elicited all the usual descriptions: "fresh, dry, honeyed, lively." Later he served the same wine, this time dyed red. Out came the red terms: "intense, spicy, supple, deep." For proving that the comments of tasters are baloney, Brochet earned his doctorate! Currently he is banned from entering France and the State of California!

This water into wine story is a little easier for us to accept than some other miracles such as walking on water or healing the sick. The trouble that remains is not because we are so modern and sophisticated and scientific, but rather because we live careful, cautious, restrained lives. Most of us are not prone to make big moves; we prefer the step-by-step, cautious approach. One result of this is that since we live in this timid manner, we don't often ask big things of God. We hide or bury our faith, we keep our trust in the living God to ourselves. When we are here in church, when we are thinking godly thoughts, the faith part of our life is front and center. But too often we are scarcely out of the church parking lot before other things crowd out what seemed so special just a few minutes previously. As a result our prayers get reduced. They are chastened, cautious, and careful – maybe a tad more adventurous than we would normally feel comfortable but not awe-inspiring, life-altering, world-changing.

Whose wine is it anyway? People come to me, as to every pastor, and in their own form of words, they say, "I fear I'm losing my faith." Some are going through a tough time in their lives, their faith is being tested by their circumstances, and they fear that they are about to lose the little faith they have. They are asking what they can do to hold on to their faith? But this is to begin in the wrong place. Our relationship with God is not a matter of what we feel, of what we believe, of what we do. Thinking like that we will quickly come face to face with our limits, if it is about us then we would be right to fear because we know that our resources will soon be expended.

Whose wine is it anyway? It is God's wine, willed by God, made by God, given by God; that is what the story says. So, rather than us keep on running over to Trader Joes trying to keep our faith going, better to discover or re-discover that true, real, lasting, growing faith, is never our achievement but instead *always comes to us a gift*. Coming to us as a gift from God, a gift that God will not let run out, a gift that God will renew to meet every situation we face. Whose wine is it anyway? It is *God's wine*, not ours. Faith is a divine vintage, not a human invention or achievement.

We encounter Jesus by accepting that God accepts us as we are in Jesus Christ. Sure, God then wills us to change and grow and follow. But at the start and in every beginning again, God accepts us as we are Jesus Christ. Thanks to our Lord and Savior, God's welcome for us is a *gift beyond all deserving!* Jesus, and the wedding celebration with all the good townsfolk of Cana, is a parable of promise and abundance, encountering Jesus comes about as we stop imagining that

we can pull ourselves up to God and allow God to give us what we need to be a faithful, fruitful, resourceful disciples.

Whose wine is it anyway? The record of the incident begins, “On the third day!” “On the third day....” Now, haven’t we heard that somewhere before? This is an Easter story, a story of abundance, a story of overflowing extravagance. In place of shortage, scarcity and emptiness, there is now *overflowing* abundance. Wherever and whenever we encounter Jesus, as Jesus encounters us, there is abundance, an abundance of *love*, an abundance of *glory*; when Jesus encounters us pain and hurt and death is swallowed up, life breaks in, life emerges, life triumphs, curtains are torn, stones are rolled away, tombs are emptied, the dead are raised, the good news is proclaimed, tables are set with bread and wine, feasts are shared. *Whose wine is it anyway?* It is *God’s wine* of a new life, with new hope and new love, enough for all.

Whose wine is it anyway? This moment in Cana, this first miracle, contains more than a little irony! As we read the Gospels, we get used to seeing and hearing Jesus obey His Father, as we did last week in His Baptism. But here Jesus obeys His mother, *and a miracle results!* A miracle, a moment in which we encounter the power of God to renew, and restore, and to transform situations and circumstances in which we find ourselves all too often, when we rely on our limited capacities, rather than accept, embrace and receive the abundance of God.

Whose wine is it anyway? It is wine for the celebration: a celebration not only for the invited elite as is so often the case in our modern weddings, but a festival that included the whole town, not just the immediate family and a few special friends. The reputation not just of this family, but of the whole community was at stake, as the last of the vino evaporated in the afternoon sunshine! The actions of Jesus saved not just the reputation of one family, *Jesus’ actions redeemed the whole town.* Jesus’ intervention allowed the party to continue and to be all the more appreciated as this new wine was shared. This new wine tasted better than what had gone before! Compared to the three buck chuck that everyone had been enjoying until it ran out, thank you very much, this latest wine was fully free and generous. This new wine had a real intensity. It was provided and received freely, shared with an overwhelming gratitude. Just imagine the headlines in the Judean Times, if the grateful citizens of Cana had not encountered Jesus: “Cana canned can’t carnival!”, “Cana: The Town that ran dry”, “Wine debacle mars Wedding Celebration”, “Sober Cana sobs!”

Whose wine is it anyway? The wine Jesus offers is the wine of the Kingdom of God that declares to us that, despite all the odds, *in life and death we belong to God!* In feast and famine, in sadness and joy, in joy or sorrow, *we belong to God now and always!* Those jars now overflowing with new wine turn the focus not on what has ended, but what has started anew. Our encounter with God in Jesus Christ, offers us the opportunity to live intoxicated with God’s Living Water, God’s New Wine. Living no longer for ourselves, *but for God and for others!* Living not in fear, *but freely!* Living more simply *that others may simply live!* Living not to avoid death, *but to share life!* Living as the resident aliens that we all are, welcoming all our neighbors.

The promise of this new life and new wine makes us very aware that God expects us to live changed lives, and living changed lives, to go on to change the world around us. It ought not be the only way to mark the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., but the holiday we mark tomorrow celebrates the life of one of God’s servants who tasted the new wine of deliverance and living a changed life, embracing peace and rejecting violence, sought to change the world, in accordance with God’s desire for justice and harmony and healing of the nations.

Whose wine is it anyway? The words from Isaiah 62 we read today demonstrate the abundant joy and love that God has for God’s people. The prophet was speaking a word of comfort to a hurting and desolate people, returning home after their exile in Babylon. The promise of a homecoming came with a new name from God, the assurance that all over again God was encountering them, welcoming them, restoring them, forgiving their past failures and granting them a new beginning.

Whose wine is it anyway? Yes, *God’s love is a scandal!* God’s love comes to good and bad alike, the wine of love and forgiveness is poured out for all of us equally. Yet this is God’s way: *God loves all of us equally!* God loves all of us equally 110%!

Whose wine is it anyway? My friends, I see God splashing wine on us as we are launched into a new chapter of faithful living! *Whose wine is it anyway?* By what name will you be known in this New Year: faithful servant, returned wanderer, difficult disciple, willing helper? By what name will our church be known: careless lover? Friend of the friendless? Blessed and gifted? Slow to care? People of Joy? Community of compassion? Devoted disciples? Having heard the promise and tasted that God is good, *let us resolve to continue the celebration of God's love in who we are and in all we do!* **Amen.**

Isaiah 62:1-5

1For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. 2The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. 3You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. 4You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. 5For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

John 2:1-11

1On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. 3When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." 5His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." 6Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. 9When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom 10and said to him, "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." 11Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

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