

Lectionary Reflection
Sunday, January 16
John 2:1-11, Epiphany 2C
By Teri McDowell Ott

My friend, who is an Episcopal priest, posted on her Facebook page the Sunday after Christmas: “Just had real bread for communion. First time I have tasted this since March 2020. I am overcome.”

I read her words jealously. COVID-19 cases are spiking again where I live, so our church continues to adhere to high safety protocols, distributing pre-filled, disposable communion cups on our way in to worship. As sanitary as these pre-filled cups are, they don’t make me feel as if I am attending the “joyful feast of the people of God.” Separating the layers of foil from the top takes focused concentration and nimble fingers; the reward of our efforts a stale wafer and an overly sweet sip of grape juice. (Can grape juice go bad?) But maybe I’m just COVID cranky.

This Sunday, the lectionary leads us to contemplate Jesus’ ministry through the miracle at the wedding in Cana. In the biblical tradition, wine is a rich symbol of prosperity, abundance, and good times. When wine runs low during a wedding party, the host is in jeopardy of appearing inhospitable. But Jesus, prompted by his mother, saves the party. Jesus instructs the servants to fill six stone jars with water, which he promptly turns to wine, *overflowing* wine. Enough wine for everyone at the party and then some. And fine wine, no less. Not the cheap stuff. The guests are blown away by the extravagance of this gesture.

The six jars the servants fill for this miracle are originally intended for the Jewish rite of purification. The presence of these stone jars could be John’s way of saying that the traditional religion is empty, whereas Jesus’ ministry is abundant, overflowing, more than enough for all.

Besides Jesus’ mother, the servants were the only ones who witnessed Jesus’ miracle. They had the best vantage point and the clearest, most illuminated perspective on his ministry. Positioning himself with the servants is not unique for Jesus. Throughout the Gospels, Jesus favors the company of the lowly. But it does make me consider, what I am missing because my

seat at the table is more socially privileged? What extravagant abundance of Jesus' have I failed to observe?

Christmas Eve, my church celebrated communion with the disposable, pre-filled cups. Nothing about that sanitary communion felt extravagant or abundant at the time. But this lectionary text has given me pause. The previous Christmas, my church couldn't even be together for worship. We gathered communion elements individually from whatever was on hand in the kitchen, then blessed and consecrated our cookies and Coke through a Zoom screen. This Christmas, we sat in a beautifully decorated sanctuary, surrounded by community. We approached the Lord's Table singing, "Holy, holy, holy, God of power and God of might" through our masks, eating the Bread of Life and drinking from the cup of salvation together as one body of Christ. Considering our communion from this perspective, the joyful feast of the people of couldn't have been more miraculous or extravagant.

Questions for reflection:

1. What details from this Scripture story stand out to you? Have you read this story before?
Do you notice anything new in reading this story again?
2. How would you view your church or your church's ministry if you were witnessing it from the perspective of an outsider?
3. What feels the most extravagant and abundant about your church's ministry?