

Scripture:

Psalm 23

John 2:1-12

“With a cup that overflows.”

In her book --- “Still ----- Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis” --- Lauren Winner --- a former Orthodox Jew and now Anglican priest ----- shares the story of when her friend Julian became a member of the church.

Young Julian --- at 12 years old --- was going through confirmation --- or membership class.

And one day she says to the pastor --- who also happened to be her father --- -- “I’m not sure I can go through with it.”

“I’m not sure I can go through with it.” --- confessing her faith --- and becoming a member.

And the reason she says ---- is that she isn’t sure she can believe everything she was supposed to believe.

She isn’t sure she can believe everything she is supposed to believe.

At least not enough to make a promise before God and her congregation.

Talk about an honest and conscientious 12 year old little girl.

And of course we could break down her statement and wrangle with it for hours.

Asking things like ----- What are we actually supposed to believe? ---- How does doubt come into play? ---- What role does the congregation play? --- and so on.

But none of these are the point.

It is the response of her father --- the pastor of the church ---- that I think is most enlightening and refreshing --- and faithful.

He said ---- “What you promise when you are confirmed is not that you will believe this forever. What you promise when you are confirmed is that this is the story that you will wrestle with forever.”

“What you promise when you are confirmed is not that you will believe this forever. What you promise when you are confirmed is that this is the story that you will wrestle with forever.”

To me that’s a great answer ---- especially to a 12 year old girl wrestling with faith --- and doubt --- and forever.

“What you promise when you are confirmed is that this is the story that you will wrestle with forever.”

And so we wrestle with this story ----- God’s story.

And of course we wrestle with some chapters or passages of the story more than others.

When we truly engage the biblical witness at some point or another we will also find ourselves wrestling with it --- as the pastor and dad said.

All Biblical passages include a multiplicity of faithful --- God inspired --- interpretations and applications.

When it comes to reading the Bible --- once is never enough.

When it comes to interpreting --- and making sense of scripture --- one is never enough.

Scripture --- like an onion ---- has layer after layer after layer.

Scripture is a like a pebble tossed into a still lake ---- the ripples go on and on and on.

Scripture is like God dropping snow flakes or rain drops or rays of sunlight into our lives ----- they are far too numerous and elusive for us to simply reach out and grab them ----- holding on to them --- or confine them.

“What you promise when you are confirmed is that this is the story that you will wrestle with forever.”

Looking at our gospel reading today is a good example of wrestling with the text.

John’s gospel in general can be read metaphorically ---- allegorically ----- theologically --- and of course literally --- and our passage is no exception.

And all of these readings can bear fruit and be faithful.

When it comes to John 2 --- the wedding feast and Jesus turning water into wine ---- we could talk faithfully about how the water and the wine are really about Jesus completely altering the Jewish purification rights.

Or we could stress --- and be faithful to the gospel message ----- that what the passage is really about is how Jesus’ mother represents the church --- the new Eve --- the new Israel.

Or we could talk about how the wedding represents a new age in Israel’s history --- a new era ---- a new covenant in Christ.

Or we could talk about how this first miracle of Jesus --- stresses that God can do whatever God wants ---- and how things don’t necessarily need to be explainable to be true.

Or we could talk about just how unexpected God can be --- how abundant God’s grace is.

Or we could talk about the importance of wine --- wine as blood ---- Jesus’ blood --- Jesus as sacrifice --- blood as sacrifice and covenant.

Or we could talk about social conventions ----- their importance --- how Jesus honours them ---- and at the same time turns them on their heads.

The Bible is full of stories --- events ---- that we can and should wrestle with for our whole lives.

The Bible is all about the mystery that surrounds us and entices us ---- the ways of God --- and that for certain is something we have to wrestle with over time.

Simply put --- it's not possible to take all God is saying in the Bible and contain it in one human head.

Jesus has just called His very first disciples --- He's just beginning His ministry.

I can well imagine Jesus wanting to give His first followers a little spiritual formation.

Knowing these men would soon assume important roles in His ministry it would be easy to imagine Jesus taking them away to pray with Him.

Maybe He might take them off to a desert island kind of spiritual experience --- off to a place with few worldly distractions --- long days of prayer and meditation and inner solitude.

Maybe He might have them sit down at "school" ----- looking to deepen their knowledge of the Torah ---- the scriptures --- the prophets --- the Psalms.

Teaching them how best to read the scriptures --- the tools that promote a deeper more faithful understanding.

And yet He doesn't do any of this.

Instead of lessons --- prayers --- spiritual exercises ----- Bible studies or classrooms ----- Jesus first takes them to a wedding feast.

He gathers His first disciples --- and then takes them to a wedding feast.

That is where they begin their journey in faith together --- at a celebration meal.

And the root of the word in Aramaic --- the language Jesus spoke --- the root of the word for "wedding feast" --- is the same root for the word "drink."

A wedding feast was a time of great revelry and rejoicing.

People would come from near and far ----- to meet friends for the week and celebrate and drink ---- feast together.

Weddings were great occasions for huge family gatherings ----- friends and family all coming together to celebrate and be side by side for a week.

Weddings were ----- as one commentator said --- “a wonderful human reality.”

“A wonderful human reality.”

People get dressed up --- they rejoice --- they sing --- they dance --- they joke ---- and laugh --- and have fun together --- they feast together.

And so Jesus plunges His new found disciples in the middle of this most joyous and celebratory of occasions in their culture --- this most down to earth and human of occasions.

This is the “classroom” He chose.

This is the desert experience He chose --- the spiritual formation exercise He settled on.

A gathering of people to celebrate --- eat --- drink --- share ---- laugh ----- love ----- be together for a while --- do what humans do who love each other --- spend time together --- eat together.

Why --- because it’s a foretaste of the kingdom of God.

People gathered together in love --- to share and eat and be together around a table.

The kingdom of God is like a wedding feast --- Jesus says Matthew 22 and also in Luke 14.

And so rather than try to explain what this might look like to His new followers Jesus takes them there.

And we soon learn that if it wasn't for Jesus ---- this little slice of the kingdom would be lacking something.

Before long some of the supplies run out --- the wine is running low ---- indeed the wine is totally gone.

And once the wine is all gone Jesus' mother lets Him know --- anticipating of course that He will do something about it and help out.

And this is how Jesus replies ---- "Woman why do you involve me?" --- "My hour has not yet come."

Is anyone familiar with the phrase --- "Don't try to make a yp an mp."

"Don't try to make a yp an mp."

"Don't try to make a yp an mp." ----- as unchristian as it is ----- means --- "Don't try to make your problem ----- my problem."

"Don't try to make your problem ---- my problem."

Kids these days right ---- or as the Bible says --- out of the mouths of babes.

In a way I think that's what Jesus said to His mother on first learning that the wine had run out.

"Don't try to make a yp an mp."

Don't try to make your problem my problem.

"Woman why do you involve me?" --- Jesus said.

Jesus chose a wedding feast as His classroom for His first disciples.

1. To show them ---- not explain to them or teach them or describe to them -- ----- but show them what the kingdom of God will look like --- a celebration and a feast.

And 2. Jesus chose a wedding feast as His classroom to show them almost every yp is also an mp.

Almost every yp is also an mp.

Other people's problems becomes Jesus' problems.

Or more appropriately other people's problems become Jesus' concerns.

“What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”

The kingdom of God will be just like this --- a wedding feast --- and when something goes wrong --- when a problem or challenge occurs --- the wine runs out say ----- not only does God solve things but He goes way way way above and beyond ----- a cup that overflows.

That's what the Psalm for today --- the 23rd Psalm is all about.

God protecting us --- God looking after us --- God providing for us --- even in the darkest of circumstances --- the shadow of death.

Even then ----- in the shadow of death ---- or more appropriately especially then ----- God not only provides but He provides with a cup than runs over.

In some ways I wonder if maybe just maybe --- besides it being a great teaching moment about yp's and mp's ----- your problems and my problems.

Sometimes I wonder if Jesus saying ---- “Woman why do you involve me?” --- “My hour has not yet come.” ----- is Jesus seizing another moment to teach.

Surely the neighbours will get together and pull together some more wine --- - didn't Jesus come --- isn't His hour --- about far more pressing needs than running out of booze at a feast?

Isn't He here --- isn't His hour all about things like ---- salvation --- reconciliation --- atonement ----- grace --- mercy --- as opposed to just more wine at a party?

And the answer of course is yes.

But for this family ---- at this moment --- it was as big as it gets --- and running out of wine would have been a huge embarrassment --- worthy of shame even.

This feast was this family's hour --- this family's finest hour ----- it was their moment to be graceful and show abundant love and hospitality --- they may only have one opportunity like this in their whole life.

They would probably rather die than run out of wine at the family wedding feast ----- this could very easily turn into their walking through the valley of the shadow of death moment.

Jesus quickly saw a yp as an mp.

Someone else's problem soon became His concern.

And that --- taking on the burdens of others --- is what the kingdom of God is all about.

In this one great social gathering Jesus shows His first little band of followers just what He will be talking about and living out the rest of His days.

The world is full of people who say things something like ----- "Woman why do you involve me?" ----- and walk away.

Or people who say things like ----- "that's not my problem --- that's your problem."

Or ---- as my son shared --- the new way of saying this is ---

"Don't make a yp an mp."

Don't make your problem my problem.

But of course Jesus --- shows us a different way.

He could have left it at ----- "Woman why do you involve me?" --- "My hour has not yet come." ----- and walked away ----- but He doesn't.

You can be darn sure --- that when He said --- “Woman why do you involve me?” ----- this was His mother remember ----- you can be darn sure that He got the attention of His disciples.

These were friends of His --- the people who were hosting this wedding and this feast were friends of His ----- and this was His mother reaching out to Him to help them --- this was a critical situation.

All eyes --- at least the eyes that concerned Jesus --- those of His new disciples would have all been on Him --- and of course he didn't disappoint.

They need \$10 and Jesus gives them a thousand.

They need a cheque by next -week -- and He gives them cash today.

They need a few new clothes and He provides a wardrobe full of clothes --- and a handful of gift cards to boot.

They need a drive somewhere and He buys them a car.

A cup that overflows.

And of course on top of all of this --- a cup that as it overflows only gets better ----- the best comes at the last.

“Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.”

The kingdom of God is about doing things differently --- going the extra mile and going the extra mile right up to the very end.

Making yp's mp's --- and then some.

Verse 5 from today's Psalm ---- Psalm 23 reads ---- “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” --- that's doing things differently if ever there was a way to do things differently.

Who --- in the midst of the crisis of their life --- walking through the valley of the shadow of death --- would --- as they are being assured of their well being ----- want their enemies to be there at the banquet table of goodness?

Jesus --- that's who.

His cup overflows so much that He wants all of the outcasts ----- and low life's there --- His enemies even --- those who need love and grace the most.

Think about the banquet table He talks about in Matthew's gospel --- Matthew 22 ---- go home and read Matthew 22 today.

It's all the outcasts and lowest of the low who end up sitting at the banquet -- - dirty clothes and all ----- "The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. ----- Matthew 22 starts out.

In the end ---- all of the invited guests refuse to come so the rich King's servants go out and invite any and everybody to come ---- people out on the streets corners --- in the alleys --- and ditches ---- and the banquet table ends up being filled with people of a much lower social status than the rich king ever anticipated.

Instead of wealthy nice ---- important and socially acceptable people ----- the hall is full of outcasts and street people --- the poor --- and dirty --- and lowest of the low.

And Jesus says ----- the kingdom of heaven is just like this --- where everybody is welcome.

Done differently --- is the kingdom of heaven.

A cup that overflows ---- is the kingdom of heaven.

"Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

Backwards is the kingdom of heaven --- backward by the world's standards.

Every yp ----- becomes an mp --- in the kingdom of heaven.

Indeed there is no such thing as yp's --- only p's --- only solutions.

Feast ----- celebration --- joy --- revelry ----- fellowship --- companionship --
-- love ---- the wedding banquet.

But then ----- catastrophe --- night mare ----- embarrassment ----- running
out of wine.

And then ----- a cup that runneth over.

That's kind of the ebb and flow of life isn't it.

Things are going pretty good --- all is well ----- oh oh ---- catastrophe --- and
then recovery ----- things are going pretty well --- oh oh catastrophe ----
and then recovery --- over and over and over again.

And in the end ----- especially at the end ---- God provides ---- and with a
cup that runneth over ---- if only we trust --- have faith --- and train our eyes
and hearts to see.

We're not called to try to make the scriptures all neat nice and tidy for us to
understand ---- we are invited to step into them and wrestle with them
together --- over and over again.

Jesus didn't teach His disciples with tidy little stories all sorted out neatly
and cleanly ---- simple and straightforward.

Instead ---- He used parables and they were often confused by them --- they
had to wrestle with them --- over and over again.

God provides us with a cup that overflows ----- the massive 6 stone jars
are filled to the brim with the very finest of wine --- more than they will ever
need --- everybody is basically already full --- they really just need a little bit
more to serve --- but God gives gallons and gallons and gallons and gallons.

But first they had to hit rock bottom ----- not a drop left --- and then and only
then did God step in with divine abundance.

They had to wiggle around a bit first didn't they? --- almost panic a bit ---
almost panic.

God provides with a cup that runneth over for sure ---- but sometimes we have to wrestle and wiggle around uncomfortably a little bit --- sometimes we have to hit rock bottom and completely run --- the wine runs out ----- before God intervenes.

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”

Is a whole lot different then you get rid of all that troubles me and vexes me and then you give me --- just me --- all I need.

“What you promise when you are confirmed is not that you will believe this forever. What you promise when you are confirmed is that this is the story that you will wrestle with forever.”

The kingdom of God --- the way God works ---- is something that we are invited to wrestle with forever.

The fact that we --- as humans --- we as fickle --- and as messed up and inconsistent as we are ---- the fact that God always provides for us and looks after us and cares for us is a beautiful thing that we ought to celebrate and give thanks for --- what a joy and gift ---- that God loves us no matter what.

He takes the ordinary water of our lives and turns it into the finest of wines -- that's what God does.

He takes us --- flawed and messed up as we are ----- and turns us into something beautiful.

God's cup is forever overflowing ---- His love just keeps gushing out for us.

“The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.

Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,

I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord
forever.”

If we want to know what the kingdom looks like think about how all those people on the brink of running out ---- were supplied gallon after gallon after gallon after gallon.

The kingdom is an explosion of generosity.

Our cup overflows and then some.

We can choose to focus on the fact that things are maybe running low --- or we can have faith and trust in him ---- knowing that when and if we need it - -- He will come through.

The Lord is my shepherd ----- I lack nothing.

Amen.