



**Sermons from St. Marks
United Church of Christ
New Albany, Indiana**



In Vino Veritas

Text: John 2:1-11

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There is an old Latin expression, “In Vino Veritas,” which literally translated means, “in the wine, the truth.”

The expression means that when a person has had some wine, often what they say is really what they mean. When people are a bit tipsy what is really in their heart and soul tends to come out. It is difficult for a person to lie when they are intoxicated. In the wine, the truth.

Then we go to a passage from John’s Gospel. Jesus is at a wedding. At this point Jesus had not performed any miracles. Up to this point John tells us who Jesus is, Jesus encounters John the Baptist and calls apostles. But there is, in John’s Gospel, still a strongly unknown quality about Jesus. Who is he and what is he doing here?

And he goes to a wedding reception with the apostles and with his mother. In the middle of the reception they run out of wine.

This would not sound like a big thing to us---but to them it was. Jewish wedding receptions often went on for days, and drinking large amounts of wine was considered to be a normal, good thing. Among the ancient Jewish people, drinking wine was seen as something you only did when you were alone or with other people---they loved the stuff.

So, when they ran out of wine, this was a huge social faux pas.

And there sits Mary, the mother of Jesus and she decides that her Son, the Savior of the World, the Son of God, should do something about this. It’s like this, if the Savior of the world is sitting there, he should make himself useful.

Jesus, of course, tries to convince his mother that this matter is not their concern and it is not his time. But, of course, she’s his mother and she pretty much blows off the her Son, who also happens to be the Son of God, the Savior of the world.

She simply turns to the servants and says, “Do whatever he tells you.”

This is an interesting story because it is, at its foundation, a story, almost ironically, about freedom.

First, it shows us that Jesus has freedom from his time.

When Mary asks Jesus to do something, he speaks of his 'time' as if it is something sacred and immovable. And as he sits there, looks at the crowd, looks at the face of his mother, and looks at the need of the moment, Jesus makes a decision.

It is wise, he decides, to act than to stick to his timetable. He shows a great freedom from his time.

One of the gifts God gives to people is a freedom from time, even a freedom from total routine. God, in essence, gives us a freedom of choice about things in life.

Every year they make a big fuss in the San Fernando Valley when the swallows come to Capistrano, at monastery, Mission San Juan, which is in the region. Every March 19th the old Mission is packed with people who are there to see the swallows return.

People are amazed by this.

Perhaps I'm a spoil sport, but I can't share their amazement at birds which instinctively fly to the same place year after year.

One of the most unique things about human beings is that we have freedom---a freedom from time and even place.

Birds fly south in the winter. Did you know that some people fly north in the winter? To ski and do all sorts of winter sports. Some people fly south in the summer and go to places like Disney World.

I was listening to a commentator say that true character comes from showing a great stick-to-itiveness. But a mule can do that quite well. A mule that doesn't want to move will not be moved. Perhaps the truest form of character is having the ability to have freedom from time and place. It is something that Jesus teaches us in this story.

Secondly, it demonstrates to us that Jesus had freedom from the Law.

The large jars filled with water were, according to John, to be used for the ritual of purification. When guests arrived, some water would be poured over their hands and they would 'wash' their hands in a ritualized manner.

To eat with unwashed hands was considered to be an act of defilement.

The thing is, that they really weren't 'washing' their hands. Some water was poured over the hands, some words were said, and the person would just sort of rinse their hands a tad. There was no thought of hygiene or anything else---it was all about ritual, it was all about following the law. In essence, a person's hands, even after they washed them in the ritual, could still be filthy.

As Jesus stood he saw those jars and he knew full well what they were being used for.

Jesus ignored the Law and made wine out of this water.

One of the things we see in the New Testament, from Jesus' actions, to the words of St. Paul, is a statement that we are free from the Law. We are not bound by Jewish Law.

Please do not misunderstand this. I am not stating that we are free to behave any way we feel. We are not free to sin---we are freed from the Law.

While the Law sounds incredibly restrictive, did you ever think of how easy it is to just follow rules blindly? You just follow the rules--and don't think twice about it. It requires no thought, no real commitment. It doesn't even require faith in God.

To move strictly from faith is much more difficult. It requires thought, it requires commitment. To not steal because it's against the Law is easy; to not steal because it's immoral to steal is more complex---and deeper.

To not kill because it's against the Law is again, easy; to not kill because you have searched your heart and soul about the sanctity of life is much more complex---but much more profound.

Jesus defied the Law because he knew that the Law was not enough. God does not want or need superficial actions by His people. God wants our very hearts and our very souls.

It's funny---many people in movies and on TV talk about selling their souls to the devil---but how often do we think about if we have truly given our soul to God.

We have freedom from the Law to give us a much deeper relationship with God.

Thirdly, it showed us that Jesus had freedom from mediocrity.

One of the things I have noticed about many things in life is that 'okay' is good enough. Mediocrity is often the war cry of many people. There often is no real desire for something to be good. We always seem to settle for second best, less than good, or mediocrity.

Yet, Jesus, when he performed this miracle, made wine better than anyone had ever tasted. His miracle was not about making adequate wine, but about making great wine. The head steward even remarked to the groom that most people serve the good stuff first, then come out with the cheap stuff when the people are half drunk. But this wedding, the finest came later.

Have you ever thought about what would happen if God was mediocre towards us.

Every few years there would be no crops because God would deem it unnecessary for things to grow every year.

There would be days the sun wouldn't rise, because, well, God might be too tired to move it that day.

Gravity would not work some days. We'd be floating around, hanging out, because God was too occupied doing something else than worrying about the laws of nature on earth.

The list, as you can imagine, can go on and on and on. But God always chooses excellence, God always chooses that which is good.

As I said in the beginning of this sermon---in vino veritas. In the wine, there is the truth--- for in the wine there is the reality of who Jesus is and the freedoms he gives us.

The freedom of time.

The freedom from Law.

And the freedom from mediocrity.