

Title: God in the Ordinary

Text: John 2: 1-11

Rev. Sharon Smith

Objectives:

In this sermon we are invited to reflect on:

- Our ways of seeing Christ in the Gospel story;
- Our privilege in life may determine what we see and what we miss;
- How ordinary things can be signs of God.

Our lives of faith.

Over the next 7 weeks we are entering into a time of reflecting on Our lives of faith.

I am inviting us to think about the question:

What does it mean for you to live a life of faith?

Today I have asked the Rev. Anne Crosthwait to share her reflections on this question.

Anne and Hugh are new to St Catherine's – they have come to the West Coast from Toronto.

So Anne: What does it mean for you to live a life of faith?

In our ordinary lives ... it is our ways of seeing that lead us to God.

Our story today - an ordinary wedding.

a wedding that runs out of supplies – in our day it could be wine or the salmon entre or flowers not showing up – or a dress that no longer fits – or a cake that flops.

Pick your form of public disgrace and shame.

Yet seeing the story of this particular wedding as a sacred story...

Means that we read it in a way that pays attention to the authors writing – an author who wrote after their Easter experiences and therefore weaved together the human Jesus with qualities of God – so in the story...

- we see Jesus the man,
- we see Christ (God in material, fleshy form),
- we see transformation (water becoming wine).

Ordinary becoming miraculous.

And if all of life is a sacred story. Then it too, is like a fermentation vat filled with possibility.

Sacred stories, like this one, really challenge us to think about our perspective and understanding of Jesus and about Christ, who we encounter in our everyday lives.

The church in its creeds flattens and demystifies the stories and doesn't give us much about the life of the man Jesus. Preferring to create a picture of divinity without humanity.

And yet every time we read a gospel narrative... we are faced with a multilayered reality...

- we are faced with the human Jesus, and
- we are faced with the experience the disciples had of Jesus' presence as revealing God, and
- we are faced with the early church's tradition and their early understanding of the relationship between Jesus and the Christ (The Messiah – the one who would rescue), and
- we are faced with the theological tradition of Jesus as part of the trinity - given to us through story, transmitted over 1000's of years in the writings and translation of our scripture, and
- perhaps more than we realize we are faced with ourselves – our most comfortable way to approach story given our status, our culture and all that we have been through in life and learnt.

We can come to the text

- o through the intellect,
- o through the emotions/heart and/or
- o through our actions or lived sense in our bodies.

And none of these on their own will yield a fully orbbed picture.

None of them are complete, none of them are certain.

It is the combination of our living into these various approaches that gives us a complexity that is meaty and, with enough curiosity, will last a life time.

Maybe that is the whole point!

To approach the Bible from all the angles and enlarge our way of seeing.

And in the words of Brian McLaren: "**What you focus on determines what you miss.**"

(OnBeing podcast - An interview¹ with Brian McLaren)

The invitation today is to approach this story as a text woven with history, literary technique and theology and allow yourself to open up to a new way to encounter Christ.

¹ It has powerful implications for how we read the whole Bible. For example, when you read the Book of Exodus, that's where the word salvation gains meaning. And salvation means essentially liberation. One of my mentors said to me, "**What you focus on determines what you miss.**" And I was taught to read every verse in the Bible to find out who's going to heaven and who's going to hell. But when you start noticing other things, you start looking for other things, the Bible becomes a different book. And I think Jesus becomes a very different person and the Christian faith can become a very different faith.

- If we tend to intellectualize, I invite you to imagine.
- If we tend to be emotional, I invite you to ask thoughtful questions.
- If we tend toward doing, the invitation is to contemplate.

The man Jesus attends a wedding. A common activity in first century Palestine. Women and men were expected to marry as part of the cultural custom – for practical and economic reasons. Widowed women were married off to their brother in-laws.

At this wedding –

Jesus was numbered among the guests as was his doting mother.

Present in the story are his disciples also invited guests.

The Bridegroom – not sure where the bride is or if she is there yet

First century Jewish ceremonies have long public bachelor and bachelorette parties before the bridegroom shows up for the actual wedding.

And the master of ceremonies – who is always worried about timing, getting everyone together, speeches, keeping the guests happy (nothing much has changed).

There are also a collection of people known as servants. They are not guests, they are not family, they are there to serve. Hired help. The ones often overlooked, they don't sign the guest book and in today's wedding practices are usually not included in table photos.

Most commentators, priests, writers, when reflecting on this text focus on how Mary's request and Jesus' actions save the Bridegroom and frantic Master of Ceremonies from shame or embarrassment. Or how Jesus' actions lead the disciples from seeing Jesus as a human to also seeing God in his actions.

- God's Compassion, Generosity, Celebration, Kindness, Abundance

"What you focus on determines what you miss."

There is another angle. Another way of seeing.

Bob Ekblad (a chaplain to prison inmates in Burlington) writes of how conversations about the Gospel stories with prison inmates gave him a whole new perspective.

The inmates identify with characters in the stories that provide a whole new lens.

(Reading the Bible with the Damned)

They ask: Who were these servants – weren't they afraid they would get accused of stealing when they served out whole vats of wine? No one asked them where it came from - what if they did, what would they have said? These guys were taking a risk!

Imagining myself in their shoes, feeling what it might be like. This shifted the whole story. When we see that the servants in the story were the ones carrying out Mary's instructions – "Do everything he tells you to do".

These primary actors in the story are servants ('diaconois' – from where we get our English word Deacon) – reading the scripture with those who have served, who have experienced oppression, hard times, who are working in the grit of the life.

Hired help, probably desperate for money – they:

Listened and acted, doing what seemed impossible. Doing it for the greater good.

Doesn't that sound like a good definition of faith?

Yes, these were the ones taking a risk. And these were the ones who got to see and to know Christ as a Source of blessing and life.

The writer of John gives credit to the servants. **Ch 2:8 says: 'The ones who had drawn the water – they knew.'** (verse 8).

The master of ceremonies of the wedding and the Bridegroom – privileged, wealthy (or trying to appear so), perhaps with a sense of entitlement. Are positioned in the story not to see, not to know. Yet they still got to delight in the offering without knowing the Source.

To act, to see, to know and to delight – these are the gifts of doing ordinary faithful things, that become signs of God. And gifts to others.

Mary Oliver passed away this week – a beloved poet of our time.

After a really difficult childhood. Mary Oliver lived a life of wandering around the woods, pencil and notebook in hand writing poems. She says Poetry and Beauty saved her.

Someone said that she must have a private grant or something, but she was very, very poor.

She wasn't just walking around the woods, she was gathering food in those early years: mussels and clams and mushrooms and berries. And while she went about her ordinary life, she wrote her poems – and gave her gift to our world.

From her book *a Long Life...*

“Daily I walk out across my landscape, the same fields, the same woods, and the same pale beaches; I stand beside the same blue and festive sea where the invisible winds, on late summer afternoons, are wound into huge tense coils, and the waves put on their white feathers and begin to leap shoreward, their last screaming and throbbing landfall. Times beyond remembering I have seen such moments: Summer falling to fall, to be followed by what will follow: winter again: count on it. Opulent and ornate world, because at its root, and its axis, and its ocean bed, it swings through the universe quietly and certainly. It is: fun, and familiar, and healthful, and unbelievably refreshing, and lovely. And it is the theater of the spiritual; it is the multiform utterly obedient to a mystery”

The world can be for us a theater of the spiritual.

I invite us to reflect on our lives of faith.

- **Is there something we need to see differently?**
- **To feel? To think? To contemplate? To enact?**
- **To see signs of Christ in our everyday.**

God enfleshed in the ordinary. Amen