

The Reverend Anna Pinckney Straight  
 “Wine, Women, and Jesus.”  
 Old Stone Presbyterian Church – Lewisburg, West Virginia  
 January 20, 2019

John 2: 1 – 11

*On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. When 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 and 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." Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*

“John knows from the experience of years now that to believe in Jesus as the Christ is to live a life within a life. Nothing is changed but everything is changed. What has been water is wine. Word has become flesh. An hour that has not yet come is here. This is existence at the edge of the ages, a point at which the old eon and the new dance a figured minuet. What will be *is*. What seems to be *is no more*. In this Word and Light of God who is a man, all is new. How else can the transformation be conveyed except in quiet parables of cosmic change.”<sup>1</sup>

The wedding at Cana. A story of wine, women, and Jesus.

On some levels, this is a challenging story to embrace.

Despite every scholar and commentator, I’ve ever read telling me that Jesus calling his mother “woman” wasn’t out of order, that the gospel of John doesn’t name Jesus’ mother, doesn’t call her Mary, there’s something in hearing it said that strikes a wrong chord in me. Reminds me of how much of what we hear in the Bible is the baggage we bring to the text.

And there’s the miracle itself. Water into wine. Fun, for sure.  
 Needed for that wedding, certainly.

But we’ve just come from words that speak to the power of the Most High, what Jesus is being called to do. Jesus is talking to Nathanael, a new disciple, who already thinks Jesus is amazing, just because Jesus

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<sup>1</sup> Sloyan, Gerard, “John,” *Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988) page 37

knew his name. Jesus tells him, "You will see greater things than these....Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."<sup>2</sup>

And water into wine can seem anticlimactic.  
Can seem.

That is, until I was reminded this week of the words of Gerard Sloyan about this text, that I read a moment ago, "How else can the transformation be conveyed except in quiet parables of cosmic change."

Or the words of Gail O'Day, writing about the Gospel of John, in which this is the very first miracle.<sup>3</sup>

"The steward is perplexed by the sudden appearance of wine of such quality. He summons the bridegroom, the host of the party, because he assumes that the wine can be explained by conventional reasoning. He attributes the wine to the unprecedented hospitality of this man, but this miracle cannot be explained by an irregularity in etiquette. Rational explanations miss the mark. Jesus' disciples, by contrast, see in the miraculous abundance of good wine a sign of God's presence among them. They recognize the revelation of God in the prodigious flow of wine, and they recognize Jesus as the one who brought God to them. The miracle of the wine shatters the boundaries of their conventional world, and the disciples are willing to entertain the possibility that this boundary breaking marks the inbreaking of God."

And that's what miracles are, aren't they? Things that disrupt the system. Cause us to think and see the world differently, and our place in it.

"the force of the miracle derives precisely from its extraordinariness, from the dissonance it creates."

And that's the point here. The wine, the women, they aren't the point. The point is to start seeing the world in a different way.

To be open to the possibilities.

Because, Jesus tells them, tell us, if you can be open to the possibilities, change is coming.

And that is a powerful message on Martin Luther King, Jr. weekend, when I always recall the words he wrote from a Birmingham Jail about this very topic – change, and when it should happen.<sup>4</sup>

*I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice...who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree*

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<sup>2</sup> Leander E. Keck, New Testament Editor, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IX, "John" by Gail R. O'Day, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), page 535-40

<sup>3</sup> O'Day, page 539.

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html)

*with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom....*

*We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God given rights.....we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait."...There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.*

Or the words, now more than 50 years old, of Sam Cooke.<sup>5</sup>

I was born by the river in a little tent  
 Oh and just like the river I've been running ev'r since  
 It's been a long time, a long time coming  
 But I know a change gonna come, oh yes it will

Then I go to my brother  
 And I say brother help me please  
 But he winds up knockin' me  
 Back down on my knees, oh  
 There have been times that I thought I couldn't last for long  
 But now I think I'm able to carry on  
 It's been a long, a long time coming  
 But I know a change is gonna come, oh yes it will.

And if you have been on the internet in the last 36 hours you've seen enough evidence in the demonstrations from Friday and Saturday, the words and actions of our youth and elders native and otherwise, to know that we are still waiting for that change.

Today, we are reminded that it starts at a wedding, with water turned to wine.  
 And that what happens when we are together, matters.

Are we open to the miraculous, to the change and dissonance Jesus brings?  
 Or will we be like the steward, who wants to understand and explain everything,  
 to bring it down to size.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, many times, in his life<sup>6</sup>

"The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

That in itself was a quote from a minister, Theodore Parker, and active abolitionist.

It is a reminder that we can not sit idly by while the world goes round if we want there to be more Jesus in it.

<sup>5</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Change\\_Is\\_Gonna\\_Come](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Change_Is_Gonna_Come)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=129609461>

The arc of the moral universe may bend, but it bends due to the faithful actions of those who are unwilling to wait, who are open to possibilities.

The arc doesn't bend due to one big action, it changes due to millions of smaller actions, in the here and now.

My friend and colleague Rebecca Messman tells it this way:<sup>7</sup>

“Miracles catch us off guard when we are in the business of getting close to this Jesus. My co-pastor, Stephen, was at the church on a Saturday in December, wearing jeans and a grubby sweatshirt, as part of what he calls his “ministry to inanimate objects,” cleaning up after our Christmas food distribution for the local food pantry. A family came into the church, dressed to impress, unlike the scores of volunteers and food recipients that day. However, they wore panic on their faces. It turned out that they were coming from their daughter and son-in-law’s wedding, which was taking place just a few houses down the street, with one major problem. They had all the guests there, over one hundred people getting restless in their seats. They had food warming in the trays and caterers hustling about. They had a bride and groom, who might be a bit on edge regardless of the present calamity, but after 45 minutes of waiting, they were sweating profusely because they had no minister. The family ventured to all of the neighborhood churches, knocking on doors, peeking in windows, to see if they could find *anyone* to officiate. And thankfully, that Saturday, they found one, albeit clad in sweatshirt and jeans as opposed to fancy robe and collar. Stephen, in a crowd of Trinity volunteers who had begun to chant “Do it! Do it! Do it!” obliged, and made his way to the house where the wedding was waiting, along with a very relieved bride and groom. The wedding photos were mailed to the church, where a gleaming bride and groom smiled with another guy smiling in the background, holding a Bible and wearing a sweatshirt and jeans. Sweatshirts and jeans, the clothing miracles wear, when they sneak up on our lives and call us to witness God’s plans for ushering love into this world. “

Are you ready to witness?

Will you welcome Jesus sneaking up on, being present in your lives, upsetting the order you’ve carefully created?

Because

“John knows from the experience of years now that to believe in Jesus as the Christ is to live a life within a life. Nothing is changed but everything is changed. What has been water is wine. Word has become flesh. An hour that has not yet come is here. This is existence at the edge of the ages, a point at which the old eon and the new dance a figured minuet. What will be *is*. What seems to be *is no more*. In this Word and Light of God who is a man, all is new. How else can the transformation be conveyed except in quiet parables of cosmic change.”<sup>8</sup>

A change is coming, let’s open the doors.

Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> From a paper written for the lectionary study group “The Well,” shared in Montreat, NC in 2012.

<sup>8</sup> Sloan, Gerard, “John,” *Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988) page 37