

“They Have No Wine”  
John 2: 1-11  
Rev. Loren McGrail  
Irondequoit United Church of Christ  
January 16, 2022



“They have no wine” is a prayer spoken with expectation and faith based on knowing or understanding the needs of the people. Mother Mary knew that running out of wine would bring shame to the families hosting the gathering. She knew that her son, Jesus, had come in part to dispel shame and bring grace. “They have no wine” arose from a real concrete situation of helplessness in the face of a grave social disgrace which Mary wanted to prevent so that the newly-weds would not be shamed. Mary expected Jesus to act despite his not wanting to at this time. Mary decided that the time was now because there was a need. And Jesus acts before he is fully willing but not before he is ready. Jesus was willing to attend the wedding but wasn’t prepared to participate.

The miracle is the first of seven signs identified in the Gospel according to John. There are seven signs in the Book of John which prove that Jesus is the Messiah. They hold the account together as a constant thread. Dear Ones, the miracle isn’t merely turning one liquid into another. The miracle demonstrates the work of Christ in a series of reversals that his Mother Mary sang to Elizabeth in her song that we know as the Magnificat.

This first miracle is a sign that Jesus has come to reveal God’s glory or how the Word made flesh and dwelt among us lives out. The sign of Jesus at Cana indicates the fulfillment of God’s promise. Water into wine also serves as a bookend for his earthly ministry as he will end his life instituting a ritual of communion with wine, along with bread, as central symbols of a new covenant the promise of the Holy One’s promise of faithful, persistent, and abiding presence.

The wine does not give out. And not only that, it is the best wine and the people who know it or appreciate are the least of these—the servants.

Dear Ones, before we turn toward how we might celebrate the birth of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I invite you to contemplate on where are the places in your life, or our collective lives, where there is no more wine? Can you identify with Jesus? Have you been called forward to serve before you were ready? Perhaps you took on a leadership position before you felt you were ready, for example? It often seems that the people around us see our gifts or appreciate our skills before we do.

Serving God as volunteers or ordained ministers is a ‘Calling’. Ministers first answer God’s calling, and then discern the people and places that calling can best be incarnated. Churches call ministers to serve people with particular needs or goals. This is what we---you and I, have done together for the past 2 ½ years during a world -wide pandemic.

Later in this service, we will formally acknowledge this calling and this unbinding. This is the way we people of faith say goodbye and wish each other well on what will now become our separate paths to serve.

So, what does this have to do with how we remember Rev. Dr. King? On MLK weekend we usually remember Dr. King’s powerful words in speeches like *I have a Dream* or in sermons like *Where Do We Go From Here?* or even his letter from the Birmingham Jail. We seldom revisit the

circumstances that led to his stepping forward to the call of his people to lead the way to fight for voter rights which the Civil Rights Act of 1964 still didn't guarantee.

Let's revisit the story. It was the people of Selma, Alabama that invited the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, led by Rev. Dr. King, to come strengthen their voter registration movement. **There was not wine in Selma!**

At that time King did not envision becoming an activist or leader. He wanted to be a professor in fact. His participation led him to become the reluctant leader of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and later the Freedom Movement which then led him to name the toxic relationship between racism, militarism, and economic injustice. He stood up against the Viet Nam War and later the rights of sanitation workers. This led to his being on the FBI list and later being assassinated.

Dear Ones, it is right to celebrate the legacy of Dr. King's powerful rhetoric but let's not lose sight of how he began his public ministry and how it ended---- defending the rights of sanitation workers.

You can now understand why King's family has requested no celebration until federal lawmakers pass voting rights legislation. This is what King's eldest son, Martin Luther King, III, said, "We will not accept empty promises in pursuit of my father's dream for a more equal and just America...You delivered for bridges, now deliver for voting rights." **There is no more wine.**

His son goes on to say that Biden and members of congress must use the same energy that they used to pass the 1.2 trillion dollar infrastructure bill to now complete the task for guaranteeing the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act.

In 2020 during the beginning of the pandemic I preached on the importance of Dr. King's dream still being on. I thought I could preach that same sermon again today, but I couldn't because the King family, speaking on behalf of millions of disenfranchised Black voters and their allies, are saying there can be no celebration without action this year. I couldn't preach it because there is this miracle story of turning water into wine that I must address.

Dear Ones, the dream needs to become a reality on our watch. Jesus' signatory miracle reminds us that he has come for the least of these and those who are lacking or have literally run out of juice or in our case, time.

**"There is no wine."**

Who will step forward to make sure Biden and our Congress and then our senate does the right thing? Only then can we celebrate King's birthday; only then can we say we understand the meaning of the Word made flesh; only then can we, God's beloved ones, say, "Let us manifest the light of heaven." Only then can we say we understand why the great reversal is the beginning; only then can we celebrate that first miracle and that now is the time for us to act too.

Dear Ones, we are all invited to the wedding, and we are all called to do something about there being no more wine. Go and be part of this miraculous story of God's promised salvation. Go in faith whether you feel prepared or not; trust in God's promise and act like Jesus. You may not feel prepared but know that you are already ready.