

“See something, Say something, Do something”

Most of us have attended events or hosted events where despite the best planning something went wrong. Not something tragic, but something that would make the event memorable for all the wrong reasons. I attended a wedding a few years ago that had more than its fair share of problems. As an attendee I had the invitation with a specific address of a country club in Front Royal. When I arrived, I was surprised to see people driving away. I have a habit of being late to events, but not so late that it has ended before I arrived. I parked walked up to the entry and was told that the event space had been double-booked, and we had to go to another space. Oddly, it required driving through the golf course to get there.

When I arrived, I learned that the ceremony was to take place outdoors. The problem was that it was one of those terrifically windy fall days that make an outside wedding impossible. They had to set up the wedding indoors where tables for dinner were supposed to be. It was fine for the ceremony, but then the attendees would have to withdraw into the foyer or the bar so that the dinner tables could be set up.

While we were struggling to get to the bar for a drink there was a bit of gossip running through the crowd. There would be no wedding cake. The woman who was supposed to make the cake had a medical emergency earlier in the week and was in the hospital. The bride and groom did not find this out until the day of the wedding. Cupcakes would have to suffice.

Despite all these problems, the bride and groom were in good humor. They laughed instead of crying. They enjoyed their wedding as did their guests despite the hurdles that had to be overcome to accomplish it. In comparison, running out of wine during a wedding seems a minor problem. Maybe they could not run down to the Safeway to pick up a few more bottles, but everything else seemed fine. There was still plenty of food, music, and dancing to keep the party going. Indeed, neither the wedding party, nor the head caterer, nor wine steward noticed that the wine had run out. Only the mother of Jesus¹ had noticed, and Jesus was not interested.

Perhaps Jesus was enjoying the celebration or maybe he was sitting off in a corner observing, but when his mother points out that the wine is all gone, he responds, “Woman, what concern is that to me and to you?” The response sounds a bit harsh to modern ears, but apparently this was neither disrespectful nor harsh in those times. We can tell because his mother does not respond as if offended. In fact, she ignores his response and orders the servants to do as Jesus instructs. At this point Jesus gives in. He has them fill the jugs with water and then take some to the steward who declares it to be a fine wine. The wine is so good that the steward asks the groom why he served the inferior wine first. The custom was to serve the good wine and when everyone was drunk to then break out the plonk.

As miracle stories go this is an odd one especially compared to other miracles of Jesus. No one has their sight restored, withered hands are not healed, nor are is someone able to walk again. Leprosy is not cured nor hemorrhaging stopped. No one is raised from the dead. Even the feeding of the 5,000 is more consequential than making sure there is enough wine to keep a wedding celebration going. What is more, it seems to me to be a poor first miracle. If I were the writer of this gospel, I might have

¹ Throughout the Gospel of John, the Virgin Mary is always referred to as “the mother of Jesus.”

been tempted to leave this one out altogether or at least have it follow up a more important miracle.

Over the centuries the tendency has been to see this sign, (John prefers to call these miracles signs as they are intended to point to Jesus' divinity) as God's desire for us to have life in abundance. The thought is that the joy of life is not in the afterlife, but here and now. We are to find joy in the many gifts that are bestowed upon us by God. To affirm this Jesus says later in this gospel "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly."²

However, this image of Jesus fulfilling an unnecessary want also begs the question of where is God in the urgent needs of life? Where is God in African famines, in California wildfires, in North Carolina floods, in the murderous drug cartels of Mexico, in the gangs of Haiti, in the ongoing wars and atrocities in Ukraine and the Middle East, and in the crushing poverty that plagues so much of the world? God provides wine for a wedding feast in a little town in Galilee, but not water, food, and safety that two-thirds of the world beg for. The question of the persistence of evil and need have existed for thousands of years, and we are not nearer to an answer.

What we can be sure of is that we have agency. Like the mother of Jesus, we can look and see where there is need. We have the same ability to point out that need to those whom we think can provide a solution, as she did to Jesus. Even when the people who have the capacity to solve a problem refuse to do so, we can continue to point out the problem. We can even share with others that there is someone who can solve it. Just as the mother of Jesus did when she instructed the servants "to do what he tells you." When we are the ones with the capacity to resolve a situation, we must act even when we do not want to or do not think it is our problem. When need becomes clear we must act instead of standing blithely aside and allowing the situation to persist or grow.

In the book of Genesis, we are given opportunities to act in concert with God. The man names the animals God creates. The people are made the tenders of the Garden of Eden. Even when they rebel, they are not destroyed, they are sent out to make their way in the world and God goes with them.

We can ask all the why questions about evil and why God does not solve it all. We can also take the responsibility into our own hands and with God's help resolve the evils of the world. God gives us life abundant. Let us take that abundance and share it with others. We have the capacity to do so and when we do, we may find that we have created the best wine that anyone has ever tasted and that there is more than enough for all.

² John 10;10 NRSVUE