



January 14, 2018

SIGNS OF JESUS POINT TOWARD ABUNDANCE

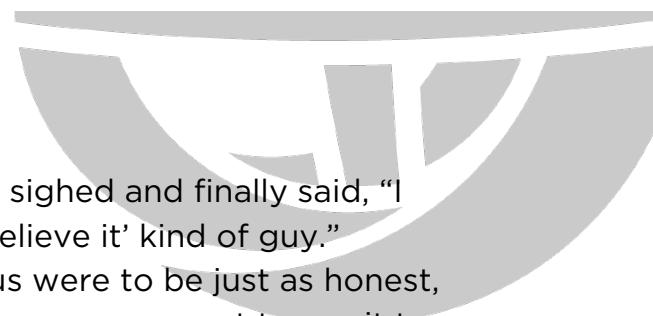
Pastor Lisa Kipp

JOHN 2:1-11 NRSV

¹On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, “They have no wine.” ⁴And Jesus said to her, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” ⁵His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” ⁶Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, “Fill the jars with water.” And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, “Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.” So they took it. ⁹When 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 ¹⁰and 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.” ¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

I'm teaching a confirmation unit with our ninth graders this month. It's a unit all about Jesus. One of our goals is to encourage these developing minds to critically read the Bible, and ask some questions as they do - questions about God and about their place in God's story. Another one of our goals is for these students to understand and believe that Jesus wants to be in deep relationship with them.

After class a couple weeks ago, I sat in my office with the small group of boys I mentor. I asked them, “So what do you believe about Jesus?” The first couple of boys gave me what I would consider typical fourteen-year-old responses: “He seems to be a pretty cool guy.” But one of the boys held



back. As we made our way around the circle he sighed and finally said, "I don't know. I'm more of an 'I need to see it to believe it' kind of guy." I appreciate his honesty, because if the rest of us were to be just as honest, I suppose some of us might fall into that same camp – we want to see it to believe it. Some of Jesus' first disciples certainly seemed to be that way, too. I suspect that the writer of the gospel of John anticipated this, because all throughout his gospel, the reader is given signs that point toward Jesus as the true son of God – signs that might help those of us who want to see it to believe it.

In many ways these signs that show up in John's gospel act like road signs pointing us in the right direction. Six more signs will come up in Jesus' public ministry in the gospel of John – he'll heal a young boy, a man who has been ill for thirty-eight years, and another who has been blind since birth; he'll walk on water; feed 5,000 people; and raise his friend Lazarus from the dead. And in one way or another, each one of these signs will point us toward an understanding of Jesus as the son of God who has an abundant amount of love to share with God's people.

The secret to understanding each of these signs is often found in the details. There are several important details in this wedding story at Cana. Let me draw your attention to just a couple of them.

First of all, I love the role that Jesus' mother plays in this story. Jesus, Mary, and some of the disciples show up to this wedding celebration. The hosts have run out of wine and there's still a few days left to celebrate. In Jesus' day this would have been an almost unforgiveable sin. Mary points the scarcity of wine out to Jesus, and expects that he can do something about it. Her son turns to her and says, "The time isn't right yet." But then Mary immediately turns to the servants and says, "Do whatever he tells you." Do you see what happened there? She absolutely trusts Jesus. She doesn't know what he's going to do, she doesn't know how he's going to do it, but she trusts that he is going to do something. We also are called to trust Jesus.

Here's another important detail. Do you remember at what point Jesus turned the water into wine? When they had completely run out. When they had nothing left he filled 6 large jars, holding 20-30 gallons each with wine. I know some of you accountants and engineers are already getting your



pencils out – so here's the math. We're told 20-30 gallons. So let's go with 25 gallons each. I'll do this quickly.

25 gallons x 6 jars = 150 gallons

There's 128 ounces in a gallon.

So 150 gallons x 128 ounces = 19,200 ounces of wine

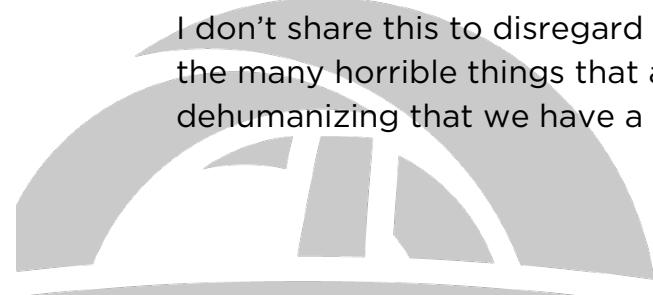
Divide that into 25.4 ounce bottles and you have about 756 bottles of wine.

When's the last time you were at a party with 756 bottles of wine? *Don't answer that.* But here's the point – just when it seemed like all was lost and this wedding celebration was going to come to a devastating end, Jesus provided the wine. And not just enough. Jesus provided an abundance. Because that's what Jesus does. Just when we think we've run out or we're depleted or we have nothing left to give, Jesus shows up and provides an abundance of what we need.

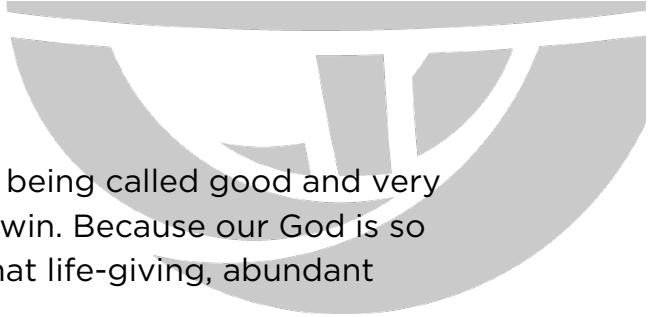
I suspect that many of you, like me, have taken in more than enough of the news this week. Too many days I can only handle it on in the background of my living room for so long before I grow too discouraged and need to turn it off. I can hear my grandmother's words in the back of my head, "Lisa, it's going to hell in a hand basket."

So my attention was piqued when I saw an article from one of my favorite NY Times columnists pop up in my news feed. It was Nicholas Kristof's column last Saturday, and it was titled, "Why 2017 Was the Best Year in Human History." This isn't his typical take on the world or national news. But I was ripe for good news, and so I kept on reading.

"A smaller share of the world's people were hungry," Kristof reported, "[a smaller share of the world's people were] impoverished or illiterate than at any time before. A smaller proportion of children died than ever before. The proportion disfigured by leprosy, blinded by diseases ... or suffering from other ailments also fell ... Every day 325,000 more people gain access to electricity. And 300,000 more gain access to clean drinking water." That's every day. That is an abundance.



I don't share this to disregard the discouraging news of today, or to dismiss the many horrible things that are going on. It is embarrassing and dehumanizing that we have a world leader who refuses to see all places and



people as being created in the image of God, of being called good and very good. But I'm not willing to let that perspective win. Because our God is so much bigger than that. And there are signs of that life-giving, abundant God all around us.

Like Mary, we need to turn to Jesus and trust that he's got this. That he can transform our world and work through us, and change us, and make this world a better place because our God is abundantly good. With Jesus, I believe that a new day is always on the horizon.

Sixty-four years ago Martin Luther King Jr. gave a sermon in Montgomery, Alabama, called "Creating the Abundant Life." Even then, in the midst of the tumultuous and often dehumanizing era that Dr. King was living through, he never once believed that God wasn't bigger than the brokenness around him. He trusted that God was abundantly greater. Hear his closing words:

"Have faith in God, the God of the universe, the God who is the same yesterday, today and forever, the God who threw up the gigantic mountains kissing the skies, the God who threw up the stars to bedeck the heavens like swinging lanterns of eternity, the God in who we live and move and have our being, the God who has been our help in ages past and our hope for years to come, our shelter in the time of storm and our eternal home. This is the God that commands our faith, and only by having faith in him do we create the abundant life."

People of faith, in the midst of whatever darkness or despair you are facing – whether it's your hope for humanity or something in your own personal life – have faith like Mary. Though you may not know how or when, trust that Jesus will show up just when all seems lost and provide you with an abundance of whatever it is that you need. Amen.

