Wow, what a party?!
People from all over the region were there, family, friends, neighbors, lots of Music, Dancing, the happy bridal couple…lots of food…and at least wine, a lot of wine, lots and lots of wine….
120-180 gallons, about 680 liters…just for a wedding…I really hope they had enough Aspirin or Tylenol for the next morning.

Well, I consider preaching here for the first time – and preaching about wine – as a blessing. Maybe I should have had a glass of wine before to calm me down a bit – maybe you will need a glass of wine to make my sermon endurable for you….maybe we should have set up today the wine bar instead of the coffee hour ☺…

Today it’s Jesus’ first public miracle, when he changed water into wine at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. Cana was a very small village, and so the wedding was no doubt a community-wide event. Everyone of note in Cana was there, as were friends and family from neighboring villages, like Nazareth, so Jesus, his mother Mary, and some of his disciples were at the wedding too. The wedding was going well, everyone probably having a great time – and then things came to a screeching halt because the wine ran out.

In Jesus’ day running out of wine at a wedding reception was not a mild social faux pas, it was considered extremely rude to the guests who had attended the wedding bearing gifts for the new couple. In fact, it was more than rude, it was offensive, so much so that there are actual records from Jesus’ day of family’s being sued for running out of wine at a wedding- no joke!
So the wedding families found themselves facing an embarrassing and potentially threatening situation both socially and legally because “the wine gave out”.

And when the wine gave out, that’s when Mary turned to Jesus. “They have no wine” she told him.

And that’s often when we turn to God. We turn to God when we run out of something. We turn to God when we run out of strength, when we run out of money, when we run out of option. We turn to God when we run out of passion, when we run out of patience, when we run out of perseverance. We turn to God when we run out of hope or run out of joy. We turn to God when we’re feeling beat-up and burned out. We turn to God when the game is up, when we realize that we need help. We turn to God when the gauge of our emotional or psychological tank is way past the red line marked “E” for “empty”. We turn to God when we realize we need help, when we hit rock bottom. We turn to God when we run out of something.

The good news of the gospel is that God meets us where we have run out, that God meets us in the place of our need.

That’s what Jesus did at the wedding, even though at first it didn’t look that way. When Mary told him the wine had run out, Jesus initially replied, “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.” At first it appears that Jesus is being rude to his mother. After all, what son addresses his mother as “woman”? And yet in Jesus day this expression was one of affection. In fact there is a second time in John’s account of the Gospel when Jesus addresses his mother as “woman” but we’ll get to that later.

It’s not that Jesus didn’t care about the wine running out; it’s that he knew he had come for a different purpose, he knew his hour had not come yet- again, we’ll look at that later.

We know Jesus cared about the wine running out because he did not say “Good, I’m glad the wine ran out. You shouldn’t ever drink wine anyway, because wine is evil.” Jesus didn’t reprove the wedding families for not planning properly. Jesus didn’t chastise the people for drinking too much. But Jesus would indeed do something. In fact, Mary knew he would do something because in spite of Jesus’ initial response she told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you”.

Jesus sees six huge stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification. Each of these jars held twenty to thirty gallons of water. Jesus says to the servants “fill the jars with water”. When Mary told the servants, “do whatever he tells you” they took it to heart, because John tells us that the filled them up to the brim.

And then the chief steward tasted “the water had become wine” – and not cheap wine, but the best wine. Instead of the bridegroom being chided for running out of wine and living with the stress of a potential lawsuit, he was complemented for saving the best wine for last.

Jesus did that because he cares about every detail in our lives, including whether we run out of wine at a wedding. God cares about every detail in our lives, even how many hairs are on our heads.

Think about your life for a moment. What are your cares, preoccupations, and concerns right now, today? Are there things in your life that you care about that even those closest to you might not care so much about? God cares about those things too because God cares about you. God cares about every detail in your life.

John writes that Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory. John records seven such signs in his gospel – Jesus’ changing water into wine, healing a little boy, healing a man who had been paralyzed for 38 years, feeding the five thousands, walking on water, healing a man born blind, and raising Lazarus from the dead – all as signs of God revealing his glory in Jesus Christ, all as demonstrations that Jesus Christ is more than a great teacher or prophet, that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God, the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

He was also revealing his grace. Remember what the huge stone water jars were for? They were vessels for the water needed for ritual cleansing – six huge stone jars, each holding twenty to thirty gallons of water – gallons and gallons of water for the sake of people trying to make themselves clean before God with rituals they had made up. Jesus fills these same stone jars with wine, the best wine you could imagine, as a free gift to people who had found themselves in a situation in which they had run out.

The water of the law changed into the wine of grace.

Our lives maybe filled to the brim with our own rituals or ways of trying to get our act together so we can be right with God, but does it really work? And when we are in a situation in which we have run out, what do we need more, rituals or the grace of God?

When I was in kindergarten and preschool…long long time ago ☺… I was a big fan of Batman and was given a toy Batman-mobile for my birthday. It was so cool. When you turned it on it would automatically go and if it hit something, like a piece of furniture, it would reverse and then go forward again in a new direction. This would continue until one of two things happened: either it was turned off or the battery ran out of power. Until then, it would go, hit something, reverse, and go again in a new direction – over and over and over.

That’s often what happens in our lives. We try to move forward until we hit a wall, then we back up, change directions and move forward again until we hit another wall – over and over. This happens in careers, marriages, with addictions, and with New Year’s resolutions, on and on and on – and we hit a place in our lives where we can no longer move forward at all. In that place the last thing we need is ritual cleaning or the law. In that place we need the grace of God.

Going back now to the miracles of Jesus’ changing the water into wine…this miracle was the first of seven signs. Signs are significant in and of themselves, but signs also point to something even more significant. Do you remember Jesus’ initial reply to his mother when she informed him that the wine had run out? “Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.”

Well, a few years after Jesus changed the water into wine Jesus addresses his mother as “woman” – this time from the cross: “Woman, behold your son!”

When Jesus changed the water into wine he revealed some of his glory. When he died on the cross for the sins of the world, he revealed all of his glory.

And when he revealed his glory by changing water into wine, how did his disciples respond? John puts it very simply, “His disciples believed him.” Belief in Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world is a major theme in John’s Gospel. In the beginning of his Gospel John writes “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God”…and near the end of his gospel John states that the gospel was written “so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing
you may have life in his name.”

So what about you, about me, about us today?

Perhaps there is an area in our lives, where we have run out of wine?

Perhaps we have been turned off or our internal battery is dead and we cannot move forward in our own strength anymore.

In the miracle of Jesus’ changing water into wine we see that God meets us in that place where we have run out, that God cares about every detail in our lives and that God changes the water of the law into the wine of grace.

Moreover, this miracle is a sign that points us to the cross, where Jesus died not to change water to wine, but to change despair to hope, sinners to saints, death to life; for if you look back to the first four words of today’s gospel you’ll see that this miracle took place “on the third day”, and of course, Jesus’ death is not the end of the story, for the fullness of glory and grace is shown “on the third day”.

Perhaps today, like Mary, we realize there is really only One to whom you can turn when you have run out of wine. Perhaps today God wants to fill us, you and me to the brim with the wine of his grace. Perhaps your and mine hour has come to believe in him.

Amen!