**The Impossible Takes a Little Longer**

**Text: John 2:1-11**

**Preached by Bruce D. Ervin**

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I seem to remember an old ad that said, “We do the difficult in no time; the impossible takes a little longer.”

That old ad came to mind as I pondered the story of Jesus changing the water into wine at the wedding feast at Cana. Not exactly your everyday event! I mean, for most of us, if the beer or the wine or the Coke or whatever you’re serving runs out, you have to make a run to the store. But Jesus has this way of making the impossible happen. Jesus has this way of taking hold of next to nothing, and transforming it into abundance!

Abundance is really what John’s gospel is all about. Abundance: which the dictionary defines as “a very large quantity of something.” Yeah, well, we can sure see that in today’s scripture. Let me set the scene for you.

Our scripture begins with the phrase, “On the third day;” meaning the third day of Jesus’ ministry. At least, that’s what it means on the surface. But in John’s gospel, there’s always a surface meaning and a deeper, profound meaning. If this was near the end of the gospel, and you heard the phrase “on the third day,” what would you think of? Of course; you’d think of Jesus’ resurrection. That’s when Jesus’ victory over death, Jesus’ embodiment of eternal life, Jesus’ embodiment of abundant life which will never be exhausted or extinguished or snuffed out; it is on the third day – it is on Resurrection Day – that these things are most clearly revealed. So when John – who is writing many decades after the Resurrection; writing to Christians who already know the glorious ending of the story – when John starts this passage with “on the third day” he’s signaling to his readers that something extraordinary is about to be revealed; something of the very essence of who Jesus is and the abundance that he brings into the world.

“On the third day,” Jesus, along with his mother and his disciples, got invited to a wedding. It would appear that a whole lot of people got invited to this wedding – or at least a whole lot of people showed up – because they ran out of wine. This was bad news. Not only did it mean that the party might get real dull, it also would reflect badly on the host; he would be guilty of failing to offer hospitality; and hospitality is very important if you’re a first century Jew in Palestine; or a resident of the Middle East in any century.

So when the wine gives out, Mary says to Jesus, “They have no wine.” Jesus gives a kind of grouchy reply that I never have fully understood, and Mary seems to be taken aback. She even sounds apprehensive when she says to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.”

Now always, always, when I read that line, in this story, I think of a movie scene when the guy with the gun says, “Do what I tell you, and no one gets hurt.”

“Do whatever he tells you,” Mary says, as if to say, “I don’t have a clue what my crazy son is about to do, but if you do what he tells you, then maybe everything turns out okay.” Of course there’s nothing to fear in the presence of gentle Jesus, but nevertheless there’s fear in Mary’s voice; and there’s fear in the servants who know that the wine has run out. There’s fear of scarcity: first the wine runs out, then the fun runs out, then maybe the people run out, and all is lost. There’s fear of scarcity here; fear that there’s just not enough.

This is where Jesus’ ministry of abundance first comes into play. Jesus says, “You see those stone jars? Fill them with water.” The water, of course, was suspect; you couldn’t count on clean water in Jesus’ day. People got sick from drinking water; wine was the safer option. Nevertheless, Jesus says, “Fill those jars with water, and then draw out some of the water and take it to the steward.” The steward is the guy whom the host has hired to run the party, and what he tastes is not suspect water, but wine. Lots of wine. Six big jars, each holding up to 30 gallons, you do the math…that’s maybe 180 gallons of wine. That would fit the definition of abundance: a very large quantity indeed! 180 gallons of wine. And it was good wine! In one fell swoop, Jesus saves the party. The fear is gone, the fun returns, and some angelic score keeper up in God’s broadcast booth chalks-up Jesus’ first miracle.

It’s all about abundance! Not just here, but throughout John’s gospel.

In John 4, the woman at the well fears scarcity, because she sees that Jesus has no bucket. He doesn’t have the equipment to quench his thirst. She fears scarcity but Jesus promises abundance; he promises living water that will never run out; there will always be enough.

In John 6, Jesus and his disciples find themselves surrounded by 5,000 hungry people with nothing but 5 loaves and 2 fish. “What are they among so many people?” Andrew asks. What’s this meager meal among so many hunger people? The disciples fear scarcity, but Jesus feeds all those folks and provides abundance.

In John 12, Mary, of Mary and Martha fame, anoints Jesus’ feet with expensive perfume. It cost a year’s worth of wages to buy that perfume! Judas complains because he fears scarcity. But Jesus celebrates abundance.

In John 21, the disciples have been out fishing all night and they’ve caught exactly…nothing. The Risen Christ comes along and tells them to cast their net on the other side of the boat, and they find so many fish that they can’t hardly haul in the net. The disciples see scarcity, but Jesus points them to abundance; right under their noses!

And if there’s any lingering doubt that abundance is what Jesus’ ministry is all about, the Lord puts that to rest when he says in John 10:10, “I came that you may have life, and have it abundantly.”

The people fear scarcity, and Jesus says, “Trust in abundance.” And it’s not only the people in John’s gospel who fear scarcity; so do we. Not just we here in this church, but people generally fear scarcity. There’s a whole school of economics based on the assumption that resources are scarce. Never mind the fact that western economies have been booming for hundreds of years because, in fact, those resources are abundant; but we fear scarcity. My mother spent her whole adult life as if the Depression of her youth had never ended. She feared scarcity. Meanwhile, she and my dad were both working hard and making good money but they always bought these didly little cars because you never know when the money might run out. Have you ever tried to go on vacation with 3 teenagers and a car load of camping gear crammed into a little Rambler?! We fear scarcity, but in fact there’s abundance!

Consider the abundance that’s right before our eyes. More than once in the last year we’ve worried about how we’ll have enough people to run our monthly community breakfasts, and I’ve been among the worriers. But you know what? We’ve got plenty of people. They’re the folks who show up to eat all of that good food that we serve. Surely some of those folks could be signed up to help with the cooking and shopping and the organizing. Abundance, right before our eyes.

We sometimes worry about having enough people to run the Coat Bank each fall. But you know what? We’ve got plenty of people. They’re the folks who show-up looking for coats. Surely some of those folks could be signed-up as Coat Bank volunteers. Give them some responsibility. It might help to shift their mindset from being a victim of poverty to being a responsible person who has some control over their lives. Abundance, right before their eyes; and ours.

Three months ago, as we made big plans for opening the Men’s Warming Center with staffing, there was concern about where the money would come from to pay the staff. Well, we now have more than enough funds to make our budget, and we didn’t even try very hard! Abundance, right before our eyes!

And we know this, we trust this; when it comes to church pot lucks. Think about it: whenever we have a pot luck meal, we trust that there will be enough food, and enough variety of food, no matter how many people show-up. We don’t carefully plan it out; we just trust that it will happen. And it does! Abundance, right before our eyes.

Fear started to fill the room when the wine gave out. But Jesus saved the day by doing the seemingly impossible. And the lesson is this: Don’t let fear get in the way of what is possible. One way or another, God is going to provide. Don’t let fear get in the way of what is possible. In fact, God provided us with that very thought. The other day I was gathering-up my files and my date book, trying to get out the door and get to the Church, when out of nowhere a scrap of paper appeared on the kitchen table. It must’ve fallen out of one of the files, but anyway, exactly when I needed it, the thought appeared: Don’t let fear get in the way of what is possible. Abundance, right before our eyes!

God provides what we need, when we need it. God has promised the Church the resources that we need for the work that God has called the Church to do. If we hear the call, then we need to proceed as if the resources will be there. And if the resources don’t appear, then I guess we misunderstood the call and we need to try something else that God really has called us to do. That’s the way it works. We can trust in the abundance that God has promised to provide.

As a congregation, we have a choice to make: we can choose fear of scarcity, or trust in abundance. We can choose fear of what we’ve sometimes known in the past, or we can trust in the abundance that God has promised in the future. I know which way scripture would have us choose. Abundance is referenced nearly 100 times in the Bible. “Be not afraid” matches it at the century mark. What historian Jon Meacham says of our nation is equally applicable to the Church: “Our fate is contingent upon which element – that of hope or that of fear – emerges triumphant.”

Someone once said, “Hope is remembering the future.” It’s like a scene in one of the Harry Potter books, where Harry is about to be attacked by a bunch of dementors, who are these horribly creepy characters who suck the life out of people. He’s filled with fear. And then he remembers how, sometime back, he was transported into the future and he watched this very scene unfolding; he saw himself using magic to overcome the dementors. Which is exactly what he proceeds to do! He chose hope over fear; he remembered the future, and that gave him the confidence to do what he had to do in the moment.

We can’t see the future quite as clearly as Harry Potter could. But God can. God knows what God has in store for us. God says so in Jeremiah 29:11: “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, to give you a future with hope.”

“Plans to prosper you.” That’s what God has in store for us. Right here at First Christian Church! That’s what God has promised us. We can trust in that promise; however impossible those plans might seem. Yes, it may take a little time, but God has all the time in the world. That’s another aspect of abundance. When you’re dealing with the God of eternity, you don’t even have to worry about time.

Holocaust survivor Corrie ten Boom said it best: “Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God.” It’s like Dr. King, who climbed up to the mountaintop, where he could see the Promise Land. And seeing the future, he dared to dream in that future; he dared to trust that future. Because he trusted in the God of the future, the God of abundance; who promises the resources to do whatever it is that God calls the Church to do. It’s not really impossible. It’s just going to take a little time. And a little faith. And a little trust. Amen.