

Our gospel lesson today tells of a near disaster at a wedding. Probably each of us could tell a wedding disaster story, and let me just say, when you get a group of pastor's together, wedding disaster stories fly all around.

Rod and I have our own story, although at the time, we didn't know it was happening. Instead of a traditional wedding cake, for dessert at our reception, we offered ice cream sundaes. The gal from the ice cream store arrived on time, but she didn't realize that her refrigerated truck was taller than the entrance overhang to the church and she hit it pretty hard from what we understand. Fortunately, friends of ours who were helping host were quickly on top of the situation and helped her get everything sorted out and served, but I guess the inside of that truck was not a pretty sight, especially after the containers of strawberry and chocolate syrup spilled everywhere!

But the hosts of this wedding at Cana are facing a different kind of crisis. The wine is about to run out. Given that wine was the most common beverage of the day, and that wedding feasts were seven days long, this is indeed a crisis.

The mother of Jesus is somehow alerted to the situation and she comes to Jesus and a strange dialogue ensues.

She says, "they have no wine."

His response is somewhat surprising. "Woman, what's this to us?" he says.

Ignoring him, Jesus' mother turns to the servants and instructs them to do whatever Jesus tells them to do.

Jesus' response is a little jarring to our ears. Here's this lovely, celebratory event. The community is enjoying itself and Jesus is there with family and his newly called followers and when asked for a little bit of help from his *mother*, he says, "Woman, what's it to us? It's not the right time..."

Most commentaries indicate that the way Jesus has responded here is not disrespectful. The language he uses was conventional for the time. But that still doesn't explain his reluctance—what we might call a "divine reluctance." Maybe he had something else in mind for how he would reveal himself. Maybe he thinks it's too soon. Maybe this isn't the kind of setting he had imagined—it's too mundane, or not serious enough. We don't know any of that. All we hear is that he's reluctant to act.

And Jesus' reluctance to act here might reflect for us, what often seems, in our limited perspective, to be God's reluctance to act in other places in our world. It might bring to mind again the questions we always have about God's apparent inaction in the face of the world's pain. Where is God? Why won't God do something?

After all, why does a country like Haiti struggle continue to so, year after year—decade after decade. Haiti is the poorest country in the western hemisphere with 80% of the people living in poverty and 54% of the people living in abject, extreme poverty. And just as they were starting to recover, the country was hit by several big hurricanes in 2008 and now this earthquake. Now many thousands have died, including those who were there to help. Many are injured and many more, maybe as many as 3 million people find themselves homeless.

The real tragedy goes beyond the earthquake. After all, earthquakes are a part of what it means to live on this planet of ours. The earthquake that hit on Tuesday in Haiti was 7.0 and while we don't yet know the full extent of the devastation, estimates are as high as maybe 50,000

dead. In 1989 a 7.0 earthquake hit the Bay area and 63 people were killed. The tragedy of the Haiti earthquake is magnified manyfold by the poverty of the country. Buildings are not built from reinforced concrete. Infrastructure, already limited, is destroyed and the capacity to bring in help and food and water is hindered by a small airport. Hospitals and doctors already struggled with limited resources and now their services are required by an order of magnitude more people. The news we are hearing continues to be difficult and grievously sad.

And we may be tempted to ask in the midst of this, “where is God.” Maybe we want to be like Mary and pull on Jesus’ sleeve and say, “Jesus, they have no wine.” Or in this case, “Jesus, they have no water.” “Jesus, they have no food.” “Jesus, can’t you help these people?”

But I think this story of Jesus at the wedding at Cana isn’t really about divine reluctance—or even the appearance of divine reluctance. Instead, I think it’s about Mary’s persistence and Jesus’ abundantly, generous beyond measure, response.

Mary tells the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” And on Jesus instructions they fill the six water jars with water. When the head steward tastes it, he compliments the bridegroom on saving such a fine wine all the way to the end.

Mary asks anyway and the six water jars are filled with 20-30 gallons of wine. Not just a lot of wine, but a lot of really good wine.

Mary asks anyway, and there is enough wine, more than enough wine for everyone.

Haiti, the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere sits right up next to the wealthiest country in the Western Hemisphere. There is enough—enough food, enough water, enough resources for everyone. The problems of Haiti and places like it are complex and well beyond my understanding. But, at least in part, they are problems of allocation. Now, I am not advocating redistribution, and I don’t know the secret to development and assistance in countries

that are struggling. But I do know that there is enough. God has blessed this world with incredible resources—with all we need. And God has blessed us with the promise, hope and redemption that come in Jesus Christ. There is enough, and what we have is really quite good.

You've probably heard the story of the fellow stuck on an island as the river rose. A rescue team threw him a rope and he refused to grab it because "God Saves". The river rose and the rescue team sent a boat to him and he refused to get in because "God Saves". The river rose and he climbed the flag pole and a helicopter came by to pick him up and he refused to get in because "God Saves". He finally drowned and when he stood before God, he was miffed. "Why didn't you save me?" he demanded. God looked down and said "I sent you a rope, a boat and a helicopter. What more do you want?"

God is not engaged in divine reluctance. God has not turned God's back. God has given us enough.

And so, like Mary, we keep asking. Asking God for help for those in need, yes, because we can and always should ask that. But also, asking that we might be shown how best to share what we have. That we might be shown how best to live in service to others. That we might be shown how best to advocate for the poorest of the poor, the victims of tragedy, both the tragedy of the earthquake and the larger tragedy of extreme poverty.

And most importantly, that like Mary, we would ask to be empowered and equipped to do *whatever he tells us to do*. Because when we do what Jesus tells us to do, a generous and abundant response follows. When we do whatever Jesus tells us to do, we live completely and fully into the life we have been created for. And in living fully as God's created children, we might also be God's kingdom made real in this world, with the power to save in this life.

This particular tragedy has deeply touched many in this country, in large part, because Haiti is so close. Many of us know people who were there. Many of us know people who have relatives there. Many of us know people who have served and worked there. Wendy Peterson, one of our preschool teachers, found out that her father, Larry, was on the way there before the earthquake and had to turn back. He's been many times for mission trips, he's involved with Meals from the Heartland, and he's spending a lot of time on the phone trying to find out how to help and how those he cares about are doing.

I learned that a classmate from seminary, Ben, died there, while he, his wife and his cousin were doing their senior year J-term, serving and learning from the people of Haiti.

Officials estimate that there were upwards of 40,000 US citizens there along with countless others from other countries in the world.

Larry and Ben and the thousands of others like them were living out God's call. They were doing what Jesus asked them to do and in so doing they were bringing God's abundance to places of scarcity. An abundance of resources yes, but also an abundance of hope, and an abundance of love, and an abundance of promise. Through their lives, they were also fostering an abundance of trust that God's generosity is real, and that God is present and living among us, and that where God is present, God's kingdom reigns.

Mary told the servants, "do whatever he tells you," and God was revealed in abundance—there in Cana—in Jesus Christ. When we do whatever Jesus tells us to, God is revealed, here in Resurrection, down at Central Shelter and Services, in Cedar Rapids, in New Orleans, in Haiti, in our prayers for those who are sick or grieving or in harms way, in the lives of those who suffer, in the hearts of those who despair. When we do whatever Jesus tells us to, God is revealed, God's kingdom reigns, God's abundant love is shared.