

*Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.* His first sign. In Greek the word for sign also means beginning, this is the beginning of Jesus' ministry. The story shows the abundance of God. Our God provides abundance, even in the face of apparent scarcity. In the Gospel story this morning Jesus, his mother and his disciples are at a wedding in Cana. The wine has run out, a major embarrassment to the bridegroom who is hosting the wedding banquet. Jesus provides the wine. A few chapters later Jesus will have a large crowd following him because he healed the sick. There was a boy there who had five barley loaves and two fish and Jesus fed 5,000 people. God's abundance is manifested through Jesus.

In the story of the wedding at Cana, we see God's abundance in the midst of scarcity at a wedding banquet in Palestine. Marriages were celebrated for seven days with a feast at the bridegroom's family home. The bridegroom was expected to provide the wine for the feast. In the Hebrew scriptures wine is the symbol of prosperity and abundance. In this story there are six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. I was attempting to envision how much water this was, so I looked up bathtubs. An average bathtub, not a jacuzzi, holds about 30

gallons of water to the rim. So each jar is the same as a bathtub! This is the *Gospel according to John* and the writer uses symbolism to convey meaning throughout the gospel. One commentary mentioned that the amount of water is an exaggeration to show the abundance of wine that Jesus provided for the wedding feast. So yes, the jars are really huge! Jesus provided enough wine around 150 gallons to the fill a 2 person Jacuzzi. Talk about the abundance of God's grace!

In the Hebrew scriptures the prophet Amos wrote:

The time is surely coming, says the LORD,  
when the one who plows shall overtake the one who reaps,  
and the treader of grapes the one who sows the seed;  
the mountains shall drip sweet wine,  
and all the hills shall flow with it.

In this passage from Amos the abundance of sweet wine is a sign of the joyous manifestation of God's kingdom.

Jesus by providing an overflowing abundance of wine is providing a metaphor for Judaism in his day. The six ritual water jars symbolize the old wine of the Jewish law, which had become rigid. The number 6 lacks completion; seven is the number of wholeness for Jews. The symbolism here is that the new wine of the good news of Jesus Christ is superior to the old wine of the Jewish Law. Jesus, the incarnation of God's kingdom in our world, brings a new vitality and joy to the world.

But are we ready to accept the abundance of God's love for us? We have a saying, "if it seems too good to be true it probably is." As members of our society we are taught to be skeptical, people don't give you things for free. I ran into this during exam week at CNU several years ago. The Chaplains finally had permission to give out snacks during finals week, so churches from the area provided snacks for the students, I had signed up the two local Episcopal Churches to provide snacks on Tuesday of finals week. So several of us from both churches were at a table overflowing with food in the hallway of the student union. We literally had to get up and stand in front of the students to get them to stop and accept the food. They thought there had to be strings attached, they couldn't believe it was free. They were so conditioned that there had to be something they would have to do or listen to in exchange for the food that they couldn't believe that they only had to take it.

Isn't that how we often are with God's grace. There must be something I have to do to earn it. God can't possibly love me the way I am. In the gospel story today, Jesus is showing us the abundance of God's grace, God's love for us. The abundance of the wine also suggests the unlimited gifts (material and spiritual) that Jesus makes available to us.

In the passage from 1 Corinthians this morning Paul refers to the spiritual gifts that the Holy Spirit gives each Christian. "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." The Spirit provides a variety of gifts, wisdom, knowledge, faith, and healing to name a few. People receive spiritual gifts to build up the body of Christ the church. Each of us has a gift, a charism, that when we use that gift will benefit the body of Christ and collectively show God's abundant grace to the world. Paul doesn't say that one type of spiritual gift is better than another, all are meant to benefit the community. Sometimes we think that our particular gift or skill is not very important, that others have more to offer. God values all gifts.

There is the story of the Cracked Pot:

A water bearer in India had two large pots, each hung on each end of a pole which he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, and while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full portion of water at the end of the long walk from the stream to the house, the cracked pot arrived only half full. For a full two years this went on daily, with the bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to the house.

Of course, the perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection, and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do. After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day by the stream. "I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you."

"Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?"

"I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to

your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all of this work, and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, "As we return to the house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path."

Indeed, as they went up the hill, the old cracked pot took notice of the sun warming the beautiful wild flowers on the side of the path, and this cheered it some. But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad because it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, "Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of your path, but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known about your flaw, and I took advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day while we walk back from the stream, you've watered them. For two years I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate our table. Without you being just the way you are, we would not have this beauty to grace our house."

God gives all of us gifts to use to build up the kingdom of God in our own time and place. Jesus began his ministry by demonstrating the abundance that God offers to our world. Like the cracked pot we don't always recognize that God is working through us to show God's love to our world. This week take a moment to notice the blessings in your own life. Take a moment this week to thank God for the abundance, even in the midst of scarcity, that God provides, we just need to take the time to notice.