

## **“TO BAKE, OR NOT TO BAKE”**

Sermon preached by the Rev. William H. Critzman

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Scripture Reference: John 2:1-12

For most of our lifetimes, June has been a month of paradox. Girls in white dresses have known this as the most popular month for a wedding, a perfect time to start out in a perfect marriage. June itself takes its name from the Roman goddess Juno, the goddess of marriage who was also the protector of women in *all* aspects of life, but especially in marriage and childbirth. Nowadays, everyone from caterers to florists, event planners and even more enterprising ministers know that June is a month of bridal surge pricing, a good time for planning a great event. Maybe some of you were married in June. If you were, happy anniversary.

For nearly 50 years, June is also a month when we honor and remember LGBTQ Pride, a celebration that until only three years ago was legally incompatible with a marriage. Three years ago this month, the Supreme Court sided with husbands Jim Obergefell and John Arthur declaring marriage a right for queer folk as well as straight ones across the nation. Suddenly boys could dream of white dresses too, girls of top coats or soup cans tied to the backs of motor cycles, as folks of all genders and sexualities became recognized by the nation as individuals worthy of love, and of love's protections. Pride that year was a magnificent celebration, as diverse as only God could imagine, where what seemed like everyone took to the streets declaring “Love Wins.” In a way it was like these two different expressions of June's festiveness were coming together in, well, a marriage. It was a day when we could see the long arc of human history actually bending toward justice, it was a queer sort of bend, one that looked an awful lot like a rainbow.

You know something about Jesus that we don't often remember, is how much he liked a good party. Jesus of Nazareth, fully human, lived a life that we, also fully human, would recognize. He did common things that we remember like eating with friends, walking dusty roads, sailing boats, going to the lake shore, and fishing. We know that he had human emotions—he gets angry, he loves, he weeps, and he thirsts. These are human things that become something to God in our faith where Christ fully human, fully divine, came that we might have life, and to have abundantly, which is to say Christ too is a good reason for a celebration this month.

In the story we hear today from the community of John, we meet this party-going Jesus. We meet him at a wedding with all of his friends, with his mother and family, all gathered to celebrate the wedding of two of their beloveds. There are a few details we don't know about the story. One of which is *who* was getting married. Another, of course, is when this story takes place. I'll say a few words about the first question in a bit, but first let me say something about the timing. There's something about this story that feels like late Spring to me. The time on the invitation that scripture remembers reads “on the third day,” and the ancient community around John surely heard this the same way I imagine many of us hear it today—as a remembrance of Easter, and of that third day when Christ rises from the dead to do a new and bold thing. Easter comes in spring, and the season of resurrection goes well into May and even occasionally June, so let's imagine that it was a warm early summer day on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Maybe even a morning mist that everyone was hoping would burn off by the afternoon.

It had been a good day so far, a glorious one I would venture. Vows were made, promises remembered and honored, prayers offered, and blessings bestowed. Then, after the wedding ceremony and late into the afternoon's reception, tragedy strikes. The wine runs out. And Mary, mother of Jesus—ever a gracious hostess, ever a mother—panics. “Jesus,” she stammers, “they have no wine.” I don't know about you, but this is a particular line from scripture that I've heard quoted from time to time without attribution at events I've been to over the years. It seems many a reveler finding the bar to be closed can quote Mary's line, but forget it's scripture. Maybe they too are hoping for a miracle. And what does Jesus say? “Woman,”—which strange as it may seem to our ears, is actually Jesus's term of endearment for his mother in the Gospel of John, remember that the next time you're playing Scattergories—“what concern is that to you and to me?” I hear this line of Jesus's with a bit of condescension, he wonders what the big deal is, and says to his mom that this isn't any concern to them. He then does that thing that children so often do to their parents when they don't want to do something: he tells her it's not time—not time to make wine, or go to bed, or brush his teeth. Something to note here in this exchange is how intimate this mother and son dialogue is; how the shorthand comes from a place of deep knowing, and love. Jesus connects himself to his mother in his reply. He doesn't just say that this is no concern to him; he questions whether or not it is a concern to either of them. He's maintaining a connection, he speaks from within the relationship. Like any family counselor or couple's therapist would advise, he offers a question from himself, to the other, that involves both of them.

Mary too has a shorthand that comes from a place of love, a shorthand that again might be familiar to those of you who are parents. She ignores his protestation. Paying no never mind to what he had just said, she turns to the steward—“do whatever he says.” This is such an exasperated mom thing to do: “fine, Jesus...just do whatever he says.” She knows she's not going to win the debate; she also knows he's going to do the right thing. There's wisdom here. Wisdom that, if I may, feels particularly feminine and particularly apt for our time. Mary's not letting herself be “man-splained.” She's not going to argue semantics. She doesn't take Jesus's bait about what time it is, or whether or not it's a concern. She knows it's a concern, and she knows that on a deeper level he does too.

A couple weeks ago, the Supreme Court decided another case that has an effect on the gay community. In *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, the court sided 7 to 2 with a baker who refused to make a cake for the wedding of two men. Most news analysis has been quick to point out that this is a narrow decision without sweeping repercussions. Optimists say that the court was deciding a very small point of law and is now ready to hear a larger case. Most analysts say this should not have much of an effect on LGBTQ liberties—our prayers are certainly such, hopefully time will tell. While the majority of the court settled a narrow question, which is to say they settled the splitting of hairs or whether or not it's the right time, two women disagreed. In the dissenting opinion of Justice Ginsburg that is joined by Justice Sotomayor, these women write that they just can't agree that the cake-loving gay couple should have lost. There's something deeper in this knowledge, this dissent, than the narrow—and correct—bit of logic and rhetoric with which the majority sided. These two woman jurists write that “when a couple contracts a bakery for a wedding cake, the product they are seeking is a cake celebrating *their* wedding—not a cake celebrating heterosexual weddings or same-sex weddings—and that is the service they were denied.” This is wisdom, two women's wisdom, perhaps even something of Juno or God's wisdom that protects all who seek to marry.

Jesus says, “this is not my time.” The court says, “this is not the case for all cases.” The women know better. Women who were last at the cross, first to the tomb, the givers of feasts, the stewards of wine, the anointers with oil, the ones who would not leave his side, these women know something. They know something about all of us. They know that in our heart of hearts, we know what the right thing is to do.

Children in locked cages and being medicated to stop their crying while those in power debate the technicalities of how to welcome—nay, keep out—the stranger. At least 4,645 of our fellow Americans have died preventable deaths in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria while those in power say “Puerto Rico? What concern is this to you or me?” It’s been less than a month since our last school shooting, the most recent at Noblesville West Middle School in Indiana; it’s been only two years since the slaughter of 49 innocents at the Pulse nightclub and if I were to list the atrocities between then and now, we’d be here well into the afternoon. Yet we continue to love our guns more than we love each other. Either we know what to do and we have to do it, or we don’t.

Mary turns to the servants and tells them in part exasperation, part cutting to the chase, part simply how it’s going to be, all in love, to do what Jesus says. Imagine for just a moment the world we could live in if only we all listened with servant ears to Mary’s instruction. Nearby were six stone water jars, each large enough to hold twenty or thirty gallons. So do the math with me:  $20 \times 6 = 120$ ,  $30 \times 6 = 180$ , taking an average of the two, let’s call it 150 gallons. These jars, which held the water for the ceremonial washing of hands before the meal were now empty, which is to say the water they held had already been used. Now 150 gallons of water can wash a lot of hands, so take a moment to appreciate that this wasn’t a small backyard family wedding where nobody was watching; this was a big to-do, and the whole community had gathered; the world was watching. That Mary knows these jars are there and that she speaks to the servants with authority gives us an indication that Mary was on the inside, not just an average attendee, and that maybe she had a special relationship to the bride or groom. I told you I’d say a few words about whose wedding this might have been, and it’s Mary who gives us the clue. From how she talks, we get the sense that she wasn’t just a guest; she was some sort of host. Some scholars posit that this could have been the wedding of one of Jesus’s siblings, which would make sense given that she does seem to have a bit of Mother-of-the-Bride frenzy. Or maybe she’s just wise. The servants listen to her. At Jesus’s direction, which is at her request, they refill the jars with water and, behold, it’s wine. No additional fanfare or magic words from Jesus, the water simply becomes wine—the best of wine, says the chief steward, and 150 gallons of it at that.

Scripture doesn’t record what Mary might have said to Jesus next, but I like to imagine her turning to him again as the wise but also tired mother, “there,” she says, “was it that hard.” It’s why two woman justices couldn’t side with the baker. What’s so hard about making a cake? Or of sharing our freedom with the tired, poor, huddled masses of children yearning to breathe free at our border? Or banning assault weapons? Or sending aid to an island in need? Is it that hard? We humans are so quick to refuse what we know deep down in order to uphold the narrower bits of our lives. Good news, friends—even Jesus, fully human, can make this slip. Our time is so very rarely God’s time.

We stand in the corner refusing God’s invitation to dance. We clench our jaws when God wants us to join the song. We say, “no, I will not bake that cake.” And even Jesus says, “woman, it is not my time.” And in these moments, these moments where we remember that the

Spirit loves surprises, God laughs. This is a fulsome, joyous laugh, the deep belly laugh that comes from a place of knowing and relationship and of intimacy that can say quickly and confidently, “don’t be silly. Make the wine, Jesus.” And Jesus does. “Don’t be silly,” the divine laugh echoes throughout all time, “bake the cake, everyone.” For those who say they follow Jesus, there’s only one thing that Christ would do. Get out your whisks and tins, ask your neighbor for a cup of sugar, count the eggs and soften the butter. There’s a celebration of love going on. Friends, this is the easy stuff, a cake walk. We will revel in it today because there’s work to do tomorrow. There’s wine and cake more than enough for all. It’s a big feast; all are welcome. Christ has made it so.