

*The liturgist read from The Voice translation, where verse 4 reads: Jesus said, "Is that any of our business, Mother—yours or mine? This isn't my time. Don't push me." [When another translation tells the story, it has Jesus saying to his mom: Is it our problem they miscalculated when buying wine and inviting guests? The NRSV has Jesus getting a little snarky suggesting Jesus said to his mom: "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?]*

Let us pray: Speak to us your word this today from the gospel story – and having heard the story may we understand what it has to do with us, and having understood may we act. Amen.

The gospel writer John is a big picture kind of guy –he wants us to understand the meaning of life – the vital signs of living if you will – and for him, it doesn't start with the story of a baby in a manger.... like it does for Matthew where there's a whole chapter listing the family tree of Jesus: the son of Joseph, whose father was Jacob, whose father was Matthan, then Eliazar, then Eliud and so and so forth making Jesus the son of David, and tying him all the way back to Abraham. It's a decidedly Jewish beginning tied to a chosen people of faith and their history, with their God and the place they believe they've been given to live – namely Israel. And it begins with a political reality showing the administrations who have oppressed and ruled over them .... so Matthew's story begins with this onerous requirement of a census and a tax.... which has no concern for the hardships on a poor family and a pregnant girl and then the three kings, the Gentiles who came to pay homage to a new kind of ruler.

And John's gospel is unlike Luke who wants to make sure the story shows Jesus as a poor Jew among other Jews, among the hardworking lower class shepherds – those outside the power brokers in the temple.

The gospel writer Mark doesn't bother with a story of the birth or childhood of Jesus, he gets right to the action with an adult Jesus being announced in the wilderness by John: "Make way, the One is coming, has already arrived really, and you've got things to do to get yourself ready."

The gospel writer John (not to be confused with John the baptizer, the odd guy in the river Jordan announcing the anointed one).... the gospel writer John is a theologian who wants to take a step back to make sure the reader knows what all this means. For John, Jesus existed

Before time itself was measured, the Voice was speaking.

The Voice was and is God. This celestial Word remained ever present with the Creator; whose speech shaped the entire cosmos.

Immersed in the practice of creating,  
all things that exist were birthed in this One.

—whose breath filled all things with a living, breathing light—

A light that thrives in the depths of darkness, blazes through murky bottoms. It cannot and will not be quenched.<sup>1</sup>

“John declares that truth has culminated in the person of Jesus.”<sup>2</sup> So Jesus may be one human in this one time and place but he didn’t start out that small—the story has a cosmic beginning, then it jumps to a strange fellow in the wilderness cleansing folks as preparation for what’s next with the spirit descending like a dove on Jesus. And then, then the very first story of Jesus, and the sign of this Messiah.... comes this story of the wedding at Cana.

This is the kind of story that requires bible scholars, otherwise, you might argue the gospel writer wants us to be party people, drinking really good wine, a lots of it. But the commentaries would remind you that John is about theology and so water becoming wine is a sign that the messianic age has come— it’s a fulfillment of Amos 9:11-15 where restored captives of Israel will drink new wine. And the scholars relate it to the very next story John tells—of the cleansing of the temple, which marks the end of Jesus’ ministry for all the other gospel writers.

No doubt in some church today,<sup>3</sup> someone will make a joke about how Jesus turn the water to wine to shut up his mother’s whining. Others will argue (and here I’ll list all the various approaches that my Facebook group of clergy following the Narrative Lectionary are taking)... that this story, much like many of his healing stories, are about restoring wholeness and community, noting that creating wine here preserves the host family’s dignity and prevents their being social outcasts in the community.

Still others will see the abundance and quality of the wine as a sign of the in-breaking of the kingdom—noting the character of God as one of transformation, abundance, quality. CS Lewis says the inclusion of a wedding story signals the gospel good news that the Empire isn't going to succeed in crushing us, that the Oppressor can't take away our celebration, that celebration IS resistance, that joy is the signpost of the Way ahead, toward the Heavenly Banquet.<sup>4</sup>

At least one clergy person will insist it’s not a story about the turning of water into wine but of the transforming identity of Christians – the jars formerly used for water ritual

and cleansing are transformed into vessels of identity where disciples become a part of the vine Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

While the story ends well with everyone happy, someone is going to focus on the that bit where Jesus talks back– to his mother no less? Saying “Woman?” And then follows that with a less-than-exemplary, some might call apathetic response to a crisis? “Is this any of our business?”

How did this story, with a less-than-heroic savior, get past the editors? Perhaps that’s a bit of good news, that this story gets told when it doesn’t exactly make the Messiah look saintly– apparently even the One who has been around since the beginning of the cosmos, the VOICE who saw it all come into being, STILL doesn’t act all that enlightened. John tells the story of how Jesus has to be prodded to do good.

On this MLK weekend, as we are surrounded by the #metoo movement, we have reminders from celebrities and politicians of both parties of how we must speak truth to power, how we MUST do something to transform the pain of this world and meet its needs because in the words of Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel: “Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere.”

And I will dare to quote Dr King here while remind us that our African-American clergy colleagues warn us not to quote Dr King this weekend unless we are willing to put action to the words after this weekend is long past. Dr. King is often quoted as saying: “The hottest place in Hell is reserved for those who remain neutral in times of great moral conflict...[an individual] who accepts evil without protesting against it is really cooperating with it.”

So we might ask ourselves this weekend, where is the moral conflict we are to protest?  
Who are oppressed, with whom, we are to be in community?  
Who is our neighbor, whose dignity are we to keep?  
For those of us whose countries of origins have not be disparaged,  
for those whose ethnic identity does not cause others to question our worthiness or work ethic?  
For those whose gender or vulnerability has not been taken advantage of by those in power,  
for those who didn’t plan the event or put together the rules of the system where we find ourselves,

for those of us who feel like we're just bystanders trying to relax a little from our busy lives, to enjoy ourselves, perhaps with a glass of wine we've had the good sense to pour early and sip slowly throughout the event,  
how might we respond, when someone from the other side of that privilege approaches us (someone who do not have the privilege of their race, gender, class)??  
When someone like that approaches us and demands we take notice,  
and beyond that . . . to take some action,  
and won't be deterred by the sideways glance we give her,  
(like Jesus gave his mum) what do we do?  
I'm haunted with my Savior's question, "What has all this to do with me?"

1. From commentary in The Voice rendition of the Bible, John 1. As found at [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)
2. From commentary in The Voice rendition of the Bible, John 1. As found at [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com)
3. A list adapted from various responses on Narrative Lectionary FB group discussing the key point of the text.
4. CS Lewis as quoted in Narrative Lectionary FB group.
5. Nathan Williams in Narrative Lectionary FB group.