

When the Wine Runs Out

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John 2:1-11

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What do we do when the wine runs out?

What do we do when the thrill is gone?

What do we do when the dream dies?

What do we do when the romance is gone?

What do we do when the passion fizzles?

What do we do when the faith fails?

What do we do when the healthy body disappears?

What do we do when the wine of the creative life force runs out? It's embarrassing. We remember that we used to have some passion for those projects...some hope for our efforts...some sense of God's presence, God's guidance.

Our spiritual lives have been likened to marriage...with ups and downs, ebbs and flows, failings and forgiveness. What do you do when you are depleted and this relationship with the Holy One seems to be at an end?

Accommodate to less and less? Or say: "It doesn't matter."

Or be like *Pierre* in Maurice Sendak's children's book, who responded to everything his parents asked with "I don't care." A lion offers to eat him, and Pierre says "I don't care." The lion swallows him up, and then when the lion is shaken upside down, out pops Pierre, laughing. He'd survived. He was alive and not dead. Life restored.

When there is no laughter in us, it is a one sure sign that the wine has run out.

One of the seven deadly sins is called *acedia*...usually named sloth. But it is far more than laziness. It is a spiritual malaise that overtakes us when we just don't care anymore, and don't see the point in caring.

It is when the life-giving wine runs out of our spirit. The monks of old called it the "noonday demon" because it struck in the middle of normal routine days, in the midst of their daily prayers and chores. It claims its prey with the temptation to give up. It left the monks with a sense that their life of prayer was not worth the effort.

What'd they do when the wine ran out? First, they didn't run out. They didn't leave the community.

What do you do when the wine runs out on your spiritual life? Go find another church? Go look for a better community that will give you back your sense of excitement and joy in your faith? Or just give up trying to find something and say, "What's the use? They'll just disappoint me in time."



What do you do when the wine runs out on your marriage or your intimate relationship?

Can you get back the romance?

Laura and her husband had been married for 20 years, and had two children and a house and some land. Both of them had jobs. But her husband lost his job, and with it, his sense of place in the world. He got another job, but it wasn't the same. The wine ran out. One day he told Laura, "I don't love you anymore."

She looked right at him and said, "I don't believe you." She said to him, "Take the time you need, but don't move out. I'll set the table for four. You will always be welcome to join us at the table." Then she told the children, "Daddy's having a hard time, as adults do. But we're a family, no matter what."

Her friends said, "Kick him out." She refused. She loved him from afar while he was in the house but not in the home. She made a choice that she and the children would not suffer. Four months passed. She kept setting the table for four. Then one day, he mowed the lawn. Then he fixed a door that had needed fixing for eight years. Then he made a comment, "Our porch needs painting." "Our." He was finding his way back. The wine flowed again from within him, so then he could give himself again to those around him. At the Thanksgiving table he bowed his head and said, "I'm grateful for my family."

Life was restored. The water glasses at that table for four became the spilling-over wine of new life.

(Story by Laura Munson in the *New York Times* August 2, 2009)



WHAT DO YOU DO WHEN THE WINE RUNS OUT? First of all, *don't* run out.

The wine ran out at the wedding party that Jesus and his mother...and his brand new, just-chosen disciples were attending. Wedding parties lasted for days. Evidently the wedding planner goofed. It was embarrassing for the wedding hosts. Had Jesus and his disciples had too much to drink? Embarrassing. Had more guests come than expected? We don't know. Nevertheless, in a culture where life in community depended on hospitality...welcoming the stranger...offering food and drink to guests...the wine running out was a very big deal.

Mary noticed. She thought her oldest son could do something about it. And we know that Jesus never did like to see people embarrassed or shamed...not about their station in life, their sin, their sickness, their nationality. Embarrassment was not a good thing.

Mary said, "Jesus, the wine's run out. Help out."

"But *Mom*, un-uh. I'm not doing anything. I'm not ready yet. It's not my job. It's not time for me to do that."

Like many mothers, she knew her child. She knew what he was made of. She knew his strength, his compassion, his capacity to respond to a crisis. She knew that he could change things. And like so many mothers, she didn't listen to her child's words of resistance. She ignored his protests...and she simply confirmed that he'd do it anyway. It was a kind of parent word of "you can and you will."

"Stewards, do what he says. It will be alright."

But Jesus protested, "I'm not ready yet. Just give me some more time. I'll be ready later."

Don't we all have times of thinking we don't have the skill, the gift, the ability to respond. We can't do THAT. Then someone...like a friend or a spouse or a parent or a teacher comes along and says...Yes, you can do it.

Jesus did respond. He asked that the stone jars be filled with what was at hand...water. It was transformed into wine. The steward was astounded. He said: "You saved the best for last." Usually folks were given the cheap wine at the end when they were too inebriated to know or care. The best for last. The last is best.

When the wine ran out, Jesus didn't run out...but looked around for the resources at hand...and transformation happened.

Jesus used the ordinary resources available to him...and he addressed things creatively. Transformation happened. Where other people saw only death...and the end of things, Jesus imagined possibilities.

Jesus' miracle stories were always signs of something about the reign of God. His miracles were not the method for the flood light to shine on him so that people could be in awe of what he could do. Rather it was the sign, the opening, to a way of seeing that we can all participate in...where holy happenings are possible.

Jesus shows us that in ordinary things, like drawing water from wells, extraordinary things can happen. Jesus is calling us to turn water into wine.



The wine ran out on Haiti long ago...with slavery, corrupt leaders, relentless poverty. The wine ran out on Haiti with four hurricanes in 2008.

And then the earthquake on Tuesday. Haiti was transformed into a place of even more horror. They cannot run anywhere. And we do not run either. We are not running away from this tragedy, but we are running towards it—with prayers, and money and water and food.

The water we give is becoming the wine of new life as we see ourselves as one human family, responding together to our brothers and sisters in need. We become participants, not watchers. We become servants, not spectators. And from that water...the wine of community begins to flow. God's miraculous realm is breaking in with an overflowing of care.

We pray that the water received by the Haitians is transformed into the wine of hope and healing. And we pray that the empty stone jars of our own souls will be filled by their waters of courage, faith and perseverance.

If we think this story is just about Jesus and his miracle making, we'll miss the point. It's about us. And it's about God's ability to use our confidence, our efforts, our creativity through the ordinary stuff of our living and struggling. Something can happen when the wine runs out...and for a moment we experience together thirst. For a moment we experience together the fragility of human life. For a moment we wonder together...how do we make our way through this crisis?

We look around and see what is available. And we see that the ordinary can become extraordinary. Change can happen. The wine of goodness and healing can flow right through our lives...whether we are at a wedding or in a classroom or a hospital room or a kitchen or garage...or a bedside, or even in the ruins of a disaster.

Even our ordinary stuff, our ordinary words, can be transformed into hope enough to make a deadened and hopeless spirit rise up again. I know it. I see it happen in you and through you. You turn water into wine all the time.

Even our ordinary stuff, our ordinary words, can be transformed into hope enough to make a deadened and hopeless spirit rise up again. I know it. I see it happen in you and through you. You turn water into wine all the time.



The wine has been running out of me as a prison chaplain. After almost 10 years of being in an inhumane system, I find myself having days of not wanting to be there. I have many days when I don't feel my work makes any difference. The wine has been running out of me.....and I've been ready to run out.

Just before Christmas, on the last day of pulling off late nights for the Christmas programs, I was going through the morning mail. An inmate had written me a 23-page hate letter. Excessive, really. A simple "I hate you" would have sufficed.

I felt that I needed to read it all to make sure that there were no threats in it. My face must have looked a bit stricken that morning as my chaplain clerk, Emmanuel, walked into the office to make the morning coffee. While he was preparing the coffee in the corner of the room, he asked me if I was okay. I told him that I'd just received the longest hate letter of my entire life. And that's saying something. He groaned.

That night Emmanuel and three other inmates were returning all the sound equipment to the chapel that had been used for the evening programs. They came into my office to say goodnight, eat a few leftover cookies, and admire all of the twinkling Christmas lights in my office.

For 15 minutes before they had to leave for the night lockdown of their cells, they laughed and told stories of some good memories they had as kids of Christmas time. And then one by one, they stood at the door and said, "Thanks, Chap. Good night." "Thanks, Chap. I felt human in here for a few minutes."

Then Emmanuel stood at the door as he was leaving and said, "Thanks, Chap. You should get a 24-page love letter."

This past week, just when I was ready to run out again, I received a 24-page letter of love. Emmanuel had collected 24 pages from various inmates and colleagues and friends. 24 pages! Excessive, really. A simple "I love you" would have sufficed.

At a wedding in Cana, 180 gallons of water turned into over 700 bottles of wine! Excessive, really.

When the wine runs out, don't run out. It's not over. Water can become wine. Overflowing...grace upon grace...wonder upon wonder...way, way, way more than enough to keep the party of possibility and hope going...until that day when we can all dance and sing and rejoice together at God's party being prepared for us all.

Amen.