

**Calling All Disciples**  
**A Sermon for Sardis Baptist Church**  
**John 2: 1-11**  
**January 17, 2016**

The prophet of Second Isaiah proclaimed:

But they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.

It's a beautiful image. God's love is compared to that of a mother eagle. When a mother eagle teaches her young to fly, she doesn't just find a cliff and give them a shove. She flies underneath her babies. She spreads her wings, and as her babies experiment with their new powers, their failed attempts have a soft landing. Eventually, her babies grow strong and fly on their own.

Thank goodness for mothers who spread their wings and help us learn to fly. They wait for us. They are patient. They encourage us and nudge us. They equip us to become the people God intends us to be.

Mother Mary had been spreading her wings under Jesus for more than thirty years. But the Mary we meet in today's lection is a different Mary from the one we've been hearing about the last few weeks.

During Advent, we met teenage Mary. She was courageous and faithful, but she was still coming to terms with the awesomeness of her new calling as mother. Just who is this child God has given me? And what is my role in all of this?

During the Christmas season, we met Mary in her late twenties, the mother of a pre-teen. She knew her child was gifted, but still, his giftedness surprised her. Everywhere her family went – the Temple, the marketplace, the city square – people recognized her son's special qualities. There were days when she just wanted her twelve-year-old to be a twelve-year-old.

The Mary of today's lection is seasoned. She's had thirty years to process the significance of her son's life. She knows that God has equipped him for special things, and she knows that Jesus is ready to spread his wings. He just needs one last little nudge.

It's fitting that this last nudge would happen at a wedding in Cana. Weddings are synonymous with new starts. Parents and other family members acknowledge a new independence for their children, and anticipate the beginning of a new family. As the bridal procession began that day, perhaps Mary's thoughts were flooded with images of her own children – "Can I let them fly?" she wondered.

Mary is also astute. She notices things. And she's also compassionate. She knows what it feels like to be marginalized.

Mary notices that the wine is about to run out.

This is a big deal. In first-century Palestine, wedding feasts lasted for seven days. And it was the responsibility of the host to prepare accordingly. To run out of wine would be a huge embarrassment for the groom's family.

Mary knows that Jesus has the ability replenish the wine stock. And so she says to Jesus, "The wine has run out."

Jesus' response is a bit odd. "I'm not really sure that's something that should concern you and me," he says. "And besides, it's not time for my work to begin."

Mary is not deterred. She knows it's time for Jesus' ministry to begin. She will not let him protest. Without skipping a beat, she motions to the servants in charge of the wine. "Come here. Do everything he tells you to do. He's going to take care of your wine problem."

Jesus obeys his mother. Jesus directs the servants to six large basins of water. Each basin held between 20-30 gallons of water. The water in these basins was used for purity rituals. Jesus instructs the servants to fill each basin of water up to the brim.

Think about this for a moment. The basins are more than 150 gallons of water. We just filled up our baptistry last week, and we know how long it takes to fill that up. Jesus is asking for a massive amount of water.

There's a part of me that imagines the servants reluctantly following Jesus' instructions: "Okay, whatever you say, mister." And I can envision Mary in the background nodding her head, and offering them encouragement. "Go on. Do it. Trust me. Do it just like he says."

Having filled up the vessels, Jesus instructs the servants to draw out a cup and take it to the wine steward. Again, can you picture the servants? I imagine they are hesitant: "Okay, but it's just water." But Mary is reassuring. "Go on. Do what he says!"

The wine steward tastes the wine. He is amazed. This is really good wine!

He's so amazed, he calls the groom to his side. "Most people are cheap," he says. "They serve the good wine first, and then once everyone's taste buds are dulled they break out the cheap stuff. But not you! You saved the best wine for last!"

The wedding is saved!

I sure am thankful for the Mother Mary we meet in John's gospel. She is a catalyst for the ministry of Jesus. Her seasoned faith compels Jesus to act. John tells us that it's this act of Jesus, the first of his signs in Cana, that reveals his glory and makes his disciples believe. And though we don't hear much more from Mary in John's gospel, we know she's right beside her son, encouraging him and his disciples on every step toward Jerusalem.

And this first act is so generous. Jesus makes a lot of wine. He doesn't just make enough for everyone to have another glass, he makes enough so that all will be full, all will enjoy the abundant feast. This first act is symbolic of Jesus' entire ministry: Jesus will not hoard his love – he will love with all of God's fullness.

This first act is also telling of Jesus' humility. Jesus does not seek credit for this miracle, but rather he allows the groom to receive the praise of the wine steward and his guests. Jesus will not use his ministry as a platform to build personal gain.

With the water made wine, Jesus is ready to spread his wings, and fulfill his calling.

Today's lection invites this community of faith to consider its vocation – the calling God has for each of our lives.

Like Mary, some of us are seasoned. We've been around long enough to see the gifts and potential of those around us. We recognize the gifts that others have before they are able to recognize it for themselves. And like Mary, God will call us to be encouragers – to be people who identify the special qualities of those in this place, and provoke them to use their gifts for God's good purposes. And like Mary, we'll be in it for the long haul.

Like Jesus, some of us are just beginning to understand our gifts. We may be hesitant to use these gifts – we don't think God's ready for us to make them known. Perhaps we feel too shy, or too young, or too old, or just too plain to make a difference. But somewhere, deep within us, is God's potential, God's calling on our lives. And God longs for our gifts to be shared. The hour is coming!

Like the disciples, some of us are neophytes. We long to feel God's presence. We're open to discovering God's new possibilities. We're eager to be moved by God's gifts. We're capable of becoming an extension of Christ's ministry.

And just like at the wedding at Cana, God has placed before us the rich feast of community: Wise women, budding prophets, eager students, all called to God's work, all gathered at the table. Right now, there is water in our glasses. But look closely, Sardis Baptist Church, for in this place, there is the power to make wine, a wine that invites us into the life abundant, a wine that builds lasting community, a wine that unveils the true character of God: a host who loves and laughs and drinks with all who gather.

Thanks be to God!