

Peace Church Munich 14-02-10
John 2: 1- 11
“It’s all about faith, trust and patience!”
Linda Wagner

Dear sisters and brothers,

just imagine: you’re are giving a big big party to which you have invited all of your family and friends. Everything is prepared, nice and neat when the first guests arrive. The atmosphere is cheerful and relaxed. Your guests are eating, drinking, chatting and having fun. You also feel good and for one moment you think to yourself: let’s see if there is still enough food on the buffet. There must be a lot of food left because you have made so much. You are looking to the buffet... and suddenly you realize almost all the food has been eaten already... Oh no!

What to do now? This is the nightmare to everyone who organizes a party... without food and drinks the party is over and your guests will become grumpy and perhaps they will go home.

I don’t know if you have ever experienced something like this in your life before. I’m very glad, that this has never happened to me. Thinking about how I would react in such a situation, I suppose I would be very nervous and shocked. I would ask myself how something so embarrassing could happen to me. I also would send someone to the next supermarket to buy at least some more softdrinks and snacks.

Maybe you would act in the same way like me. Or perhaps you are more relaxed so you wouldn’t feel so bad about this trouble...

A situation like this challenges us because we are not in control anymore. We depend on how the others will react. If they react appreciative, everything will be fine. But if they don’t have sympathy for you, it will be a flop.

In the Bible a story is told where such a nightmare has happened to a bride couple. It should be the most beautiful day of their lives and suddenly they ran out of wine...

The story is written down in the Gospel of John, chapter 2:

“On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him: “They have no more wine.” “Dear woman, why do you involve me?”, Jesus replied, “my time has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants: “Do whatever he tells you.” Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants: “Fill the jars with water.”, so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them: “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said: “Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.” This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.”

You looked at pictures of Achim Schuster in the last few services at Peace Church. And he also made one about this story. It's on the front page of your bulletin.

In the centre of the picture are Mary and the servant. Actually I have expected that the bride couple is in the centre of a picture about a wedding-miracle-story. It's about them. It was their feast, their special day. I think it's a pity that their reaction isn't described in the story. They must be very astonished about the new wine and where it comes from because they haven't bought it. I wonder if they have ever come to know who has been responsible for this miracle.

Another possibility would be that Jesus is in the centre of the picture because it was his first miraculous sign and he revealed his glory in this sign.

So why is Mary in the centre? If we look at story we will see that she was with Jesus and his disciples at the wedding. She also realized very quickly that they didn't have enough wine and she called Jesus' attention to the lack of wine. I ask myself what she expected him to do: a miracle? Or practical help?

When Jesus had called his disciples, he had proclaimed to do great things and he had said to them: “You shall see greater things than that. I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” (John 1: 51) Perhaps she remembered the speech and she thought that this could be a good opportunity to show his glory to the people.

Reading the text it sounds quite harsh how Jesus answered his mother. “Dear woman, why do you involve me?”, Jesus replied, “my time has not yet come.” It creates a distance between him and his mother because he called her like he used to call women in general. I think she realized now that Jesus is not only her son; he is even more, he is the Son of God. His job is to fulfil the will of his father in heaven and so far that moment has not come yet.

Mary accepted the response of Jesus but she didn't keep out of this issue. She told the servants to do whatever Jesus will tell them. And for the second time she called to someone's attention- first Jesus' attention to the lack of wine and now the servants' attention to the action of Jesus- and thus she prepared the way that the miracle could happen.

Sometimes I'm like Mary: I see a problem and I want to solve it now. I urge God in my prayers to answer them very fast. And if he doesn't do it directly, I will feel like he says to me: “My time has not come yet.” That's disappointing and hard, especially if I really want something. I think that's the difficult part about waiting for me. I depend on how and when God reacts. It's not under my control anymore and I can't define it anymore. A postcard, which I have at home, says it clearly: “Waiting means to trust God that he knows what to do.” (by John Ortberg). That challenges me.

Mary waited because she knew that Jesus would act even though the moment wasn't in her hand. She expected it because she trusted in Jesus fully. He had heard her concern and she committed the problem to him.

At this point of the story I can see that the relationship to Jesus is not about knowing and planning my future but about trusting and expecting. In this story we can learn a lot about faith. As it is written in Hebrews chapter 11, “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Mary didn't know what will happen and when but she expected a miracle of her son, the Son of God, in this moment. So she prepared everything for his action that she could do in her situation.

To expect a miracle of God doesn't mean that I'm not involved anymore. My part isn't just to sit and wait until God will do something. I can prepare a miracle actively because I expect one. I will do everything that is possible for me to do, so that it will happen.

For example I can't pray for peace in the world and not be at peace with my family. By praying for peace God will open my heart that I can see in which part of my life I need change so that a miracle can occur.

A miracle takes its beginning with me. I want to be open for what God tells me to do. The servants did what Jesus told them even though it might sound a little bit ridiculous to them.

He demanded from them to fill these huge jars with water first and afterwards they had to draw a little bit of water again. What kind of instructions are these? But they obeyed and so they became the witnesses of the first sign of Jesus.

Jesus provoked the guests with his doing. These jars were supposed to be for the ceremonial washing and now he turned the water inside into wine. Jesus is uncommon and his actions are absolutely unpredictable.

In the background of the picture we can see how surprised the master of banquet, the bridegroom and also the other guests have been. They were perplexed by the sudden appearance of wine of such quality. And here rational explanations miss the mark.

It is interesting to think about the expectations of the bride couple and their master of banquet, too. Did they reckon a wonder? Did they ask for one when they had realized that there wasn't enough wine?

Perhaps they didn't have so much time to think about it. Jesus came into their lives without asking what they want or need. He took action without presenting himself as the one who can improve their lives. We can read in the story that only the servants, Jesus' mother and his disciples realized what happened. The other guests might have thought that they just found more jars with wine. But those, who witnessed Jesus' actions, could comprehend that they saw the revelation of God's presence.

I think this could be the reason why Jesus is not in the picture. It's not about him as a person. He doesn't want to be celebrated for what he did. He revealed his glory in a sign but it's only recognizable for those who know who he is and trust in him.

The wonder of turning water into wine is a sign for God's presence in our world. God is near to his people everywhere and in every situation. He sees the need and the problems we have in our daily life. It hasn't been a life-threatening situation for the bride couple and still Jesus helped them. He turned the water not only in an average wine but in a first choice wine. He beat everything that had been there before.

In the Bible the picture of a wedding feast is a parable for the kingdom of God. As we heard in the second reading Jesus told stories in which he compared the kingdom of God with a great banquet or a wedding. A wedding is a joyful event, where the people are happy and cheerful and the kingdom of God will be alike. When God's kingdom will come, there will be joy and happiness, no more tears, sorrow or pain. God gave this promise to us in many passages of the Bible. We can hold on to this hope in every circumstance of our lives.

But Jesus didn't only talk about the kingdom of God but also took action. He didn't said to the bride couple: "Don't worry about the lack of wine; one day when God will come to earth again, you will have more than enough!"

He has shown them the kingdom of God quite plainly. It has begun with him as the Son of God. He let them see and taste how good is God. Jesus has given them more than they had known before. He didn't just help them out but he made their lives better. He turned water into wine and he pointed at God's goodness and presence among them.

People still don't live in heavenly circumstances today. We experience pain and difficulties in our lives. God's kingdom is among us in spite of all difficulties. It started with Jesus and it's growing a little bit more every day. It's like a mustard seed that was planted 2000 years ago and is still growing.

Jesus comes also into our lives; he sees our small and big problems. We can pray for every kind of issue, even it seems so small and insignificant.

I want to share a small experience of myself with you: Last week I went home to my parents. I live in a room in a hall of residence and sometimes I forget to lock my door up. So I sat in the bus and I couldn't remember if I locked my door. Had I forgotten to it everyone could come into my room. So I prayed: "Please let my door be locked..." I couldn't check it in this very moment but I knew that now I had to trust in the Lord that everything would be fine. And I became calm and when I was at home it was almost forgotten. It sounds a little bit ridiculous for me to talk about it. But I experienced that God made me calm even though I didn't know if my door was locked. For me in that situation it was a little miracle. I experienced God's action and presence in this everyday situation. And when I came back on Monday my door was locked. I was very glad about it and I decided to be more aware in everything I do.

As Jesus turned water into wine in the story he changes our lives. He gives more we ever expected. And I'm sure that he still surprises those who trust in him in his uncommon ways of acting.

Sometimes I imagine that God will act in a specific way and that's usually the way I would prefer it. But it's not always like this, sometimes it can be totally different and it can happen that we even don't notice that God did a small miracle in our lives.

I think Achim Schuster did a great job in making Mary and the servant the centre of the picture. A miracle will happen when I open my eyes for it and when I'm sensitive for the small signs in my life. Difficulties are opportunities for God to act. God will act in our lives and he will give joy and hope to us. The kingdom of God has already begun among us.

And I hope and trust that we will have many more joyful and happy moments today and in future. He is with us not only in happiness but also in sad times when we doubt the goodness of God. In these moments he will be near to us and he will comfort us.

Lent will begin next Sunday. Perhaps these 40 days until Easter are a good opportunity to be sensitive to what Jesus has already done in our lives and what he is doing right now.

May we become confident, patient and expectant like Mary so that we may see and feel God's goodness everyday.

Amen.