"And the Waiters Winked"
A Sermon delivered by Rev. John Balicki
St. Luke's Church, Wilton, Maine
January 19, 2025; The Second Sunday after the Epiphany

Based on John 2:1-12

It was a wedding –then even more than now it marked the turning point in someone's life. Wedding parties at that time lasted a whole week – you needed a lot of wine. If there was only one daughter, it was the biggest party that family ever threw in their whole lives. You didn't want to run out of wine. Now I know the practical among you are saying, "Did these people really need more wine after partying for almost a week? And 150 gallons? 150 gallons!! That's not going to do anyone any good" Practical yes, but not what John was after in telling us this story. First of all it was an embarrassment to the hosts. You just don't want to run out of food and drink in front of the whole town and all your relatives when you are throwing the biggest party of your life. I think we all can get that.

While Jesus gets all the credit forsaving the party and turning water into wine, there are two other key players in this story that needed to make it happen (that being mom) and to appreciate what really happened (the waiters). Let's take a deeper dive into each because they are the ones we can learn from and I'm indebted to Debie Thomas for her four insights.

First Mary the mother of Jesus. Quietly, urgently, after pulling her distracted son away from his friends, away from the music and the dancing, away from the servants working hard to hide their growing panic as countless wedding guests swirl obliviously around them. I imagine Mary takes Jesus into an inner room, fixes his attention with a stern stare, and whispers the shameful news into his ear: "They have no wine."

Yes the first thing she did was notice. She sees what's amiss. She perceives the high likelihood of scandal and humiliation to the bride's family brewing beneath a seemingly glossy surface. Mary notices and registers concern before Jesus does. So how well do we notice? The person in need out in the community, the injustices in the world, the person right here in church who is a little quiet, who is sitting by themselves, who goes to communion with a tear in their eye?

Next she goes to the right person. She knows what Jesus is capable of even though he has not done any public miracles, and she trusts that he alone can meet the need she perceives. How often do we go to the wrong person? To complain about someone we

are having an issue with to everyone else but the person we are having an issue with? Or to complain about a community issue to everyone but those who have the authority to correct it?

Third she persists. Why Jesus initially balks at her request we don't know. Was he having too good a time or wanted his first miracle to be something more splashy. Mary, as perhaps only a mother can, persists until she gets the answer needed.

Finally she instills trust and invites obedience. She doesn't micromanage or control; she doesn't look over Jesus' shoulder to make sure he is doing everything the right way. She simply says to the waiters, "Do whatever he tells you". She instills trust in the waiters that this guy knows what he's doing.

While everyone is enjoying the new wine, Mary queen of the apostles made sure it happened. Can we model Mary? Can we notice, name, persist, and trust? No matter how profound the scarcity, no matter how impossible the situation, can we elbow our way in, pull Jesus aside, ask earnestly for help, and ready ourselves for action. Can we keep human need squarely before our eyes, even and especially when denial, apathy, or distraction are easier options?

So remind me again why this miracle was so important and why we needed 150 gallons? Well all these gallons represent that the fullness of time had come. It was the dawn of a new age, that the Messiah had arrived. The prophet Amos had foretold that when wine became abundant, that Israel would be restored. You are right that no one person or perhaps even a party needs 150 gallons of wine but the disciples needed a Messiah and the world needed a Messiah. John calls it the first of his signs; it was done for his disciples so they would believe in him. Their call was over and they were invited into understanding the mystery, seeing the power and glory of Jesus and leading them to a deeper faith and trust in him. And for the world? It's the last of the three identified epiphanies. This is God's glory and an indication of the transformation of the world. Jesus himself is the new wine who will bring God's Kingdom to reality.

So who was the first to really get all that?? The disciples? Took them a while and many lessons. The world?? Still waiting on that one. But the waiters??? Notice the parentheses in the text, "(though the servants who had drawn the water knew)". Notice the detail John goes into about how this water gets changed to wine when the story is pretty short on most other details. It needed the cooperation of the waiters. And how did they let Jesus know they got the message?? They winked. I'd bet our parish budget on it. Some describe winking as a lost art but we wink to build some camaraderie – to say we understand, we're on the same team, we're OK.

And this is where we circle back to Christmas Eve and our focus on the shepherds being the first to receive the message from the angels of the birth of the Messiah - the lowest on the social order hear and understand first. And how many of you noticed the waiters or servants in this painting? The lowest on the social order understand first. But what comes next? Just as we wondered what the shepherds did the rest of their lives with the revelation of the birth of Jesus, and we wondered on Epiphany how the lives of the Magi changed after they returned home, what did the waiters do with all that understanding and revelation?? Did they take it back to their own families, their hometowns? The new age has come! I met a man who can change water into wine! I'd like to think so.

So we come to us and our lives parallel those of the waiters. Through our baptisms and our sharing in the Eucharist, we have been let into the mystery, into the secret. Something draws us here. Something here adds to life, defines life, is life. The power of word, bread, wine, and community makes it worthwhile to be here.

So perhaps we know what our life of faith and our community means to us and we can give the wink to each other. But the purpose of the miracle was to reveal his glory not only to his disciples but also to the world. So how do we do that?? You guessed it. We need to be like the waiters at Cana of Galilee and we need to go out into the community and do some winking.

And we need to remind ourselves to be more like Mary: to notice, to name, to persist, to trust. Because we're part of a community that changes water into wine, even wine into Blood! We have to tell the story. It's our Epiphany message. Mary persisted; the waiters winked. Think we can?