

Sermon – John 2:1-11
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“The Best for Last”

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace be unto you and peace in the name God the Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

1. It was through his voice that I fell in love with baseball. While I never became a fan of the Milwaukee Brewers, they were the local team, and it was Bob Uecker’s voice that I would listen to on my portable AM radio during the long, languid evenings in the Wisconsin summers of my childhood. Uecker has been on my mind this week in the wake of his death, of course. Mr. Baseball, as he was known, was about as bad a baseball player as one could be and still be considered a baseball player. It was through his work as a radio announcer that he cemented his legacy in baseball, work for which he was recognized with the Ford C. Frick Award in 2003. In his acceptance speech for the award, at the Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, Uecker spoke of his own Wisconsin childhood. He was a son of an immigrant father, a dad from Switzerland who wanted young Bob to have the best American upbringing. So it was that his dad bought a football for them to play with. They spent an afternoon trying to learn the game, but no matter how much they passed, punted, kicked, and handed the ball off to each other, they just couldn’t seem to get the hang of it. It was at that point that a kind neighbor came over and inflated the ball for them, which made all the difference.
2. Uninflated footballs are about as useful as empty wine barrels. Which is where we find Jesus today, the third day since his baptism, at a wedding at Cana in Galilee. During a wedding celebration that may have lasted upwards

of a week, the wine has given out. Not an ideal situation for such a life celebration. Jesus seems disinclined, at first, to do anything about it. And when he does do something, it's an under the radar miracle, or "sign" as John refers to it. But do something he does, changing the water in the stone jars set aside for the rites of purification into wine, upwards of 900 bottles of it in modern measure. Where there was once emptiness, Jesus gives abundance. And not only of quantity. Jesus gives, creates, the best. Where once there once emptiness, Jesus creates fullness. Where there was nothing, Jesus creates everything.

3. With what emptiness did you arrive here this morning? Emptiness, of course, sneaks up on us. We think we have enough until we don't. Of wealth or health, life or love, whatever it might be, it disappears slowly, like one glass of wine at a time. I was reminded in a sermon commentary this week of Oak Park's own Ernest Hemingway, who in an exchange in *The Sun Also Rises* describes how bankruptcy happened to one of the characters: "Two ways. Gradually, then suddenly." And isn't that the way of things? We think we can hold out, hang on, but eventually it gives out. Perhaps, on this cold January day, that's how we feel this morning, in this room that used to be fuller, didn't it? Didn't we used to have more? People in the pews, offerings in the plates, whatever? Never mind what is going on in our own lives. Or in this world of fire and war and woe in which the barrels and jars of justice and peace so often run dry.
4. But today, in his first sign, Jesus reminds us that nothing is more than enough for our God. That the One who made galaxies out of nothing, the One who changes water into wine, can work with whatever we have. Or don't have, for that matter. Tomorrow, our nation pauses to give thanks for the life, work, and ministry of The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who brought us to the mountaintop that is always present, even in the midst of misery, to remind us of that Kingdom that will come in spite of our sinful selves. Dr. King, of

course, was not created out of nothing, but was shaped by the saints who came before him. One of his father's classmates at Morehouse was the Howard Thurman, a teacher who had a lasting impact on the younger King. King, in the midst of his own struggle for racial and socioeconomic equality and opportunity, things of which our nation is so often empty, was no doubt strengthened by Thurman's words: "When we have exhausted our store of endurance, / . . . When we reach the end of our hoarded resources / Our Father's full giving is only begun." Dr. King is so significant, so singular, that it feels odd to think of him being influenced by others. But when we remember that he was, we remember, too, that he influences us. Dr. King, like all the saints, is not stuck on a shelf, reminding us of the greatness of his work. He is alive in Christ, reminding us that God is calling us, out of our emptiness, into the work God has in mind for us to do. And goodness knows our world needs it. God, through the Spirit, is gifting us with a multitude of gifts with which we will live into the days to come. To be spiritual, St. Paul reminds us today, is not to have vague, fuzzy feelings. To be spiritual is to be blessed with a variety, a plenitude of gifts through which God is bringing fullness to this world.

5. For here, at the start of his ministry, Jesus shows forth the fullness that is to come. In John 2, we have two separate third days. On the third day after his baptism, Jesus turns water into wine, quietly speaking of how his own blood, freely given, will one day become the saving, sacramental lifeblood for the world. And, in the next scene, Jesus will speak of how the Temple torn down will be built back in three days, proclaiming not an earthly project of reconstruction but the divine gift of resurrection, of God restoring life where there was no life, nothing at all. And on top of that, Jesus's first sign is not merely functional. It is celebratory. Silly, almost. Did they really need more wine? Perhaps not. But what better way to point a sign to the Kingdom than to proclaim that God does not provide just enough to get by. God, in Christ, provides the best, when we least expect it, and does so for the sake of a party,

a celebration, the unending feast of joy which God's goodness never gives out. Amen.

And now may that peace that passes all understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, this day and forever. Amen.