

Large Portions

John 2:1-11

Timothy L. Carson

June 24, 2018

As we've been eating our way through the faith in this series on the table, we've noticed that the early Christians didn't so much have worship with a ritual of communion attached to it. Rather, they gathered on the first day of the week for a meal, a Greco-Roman style meal, in which they broke bread and said prayers, had a real meal they shared together, and then after sharing a cup of wine had a discussion of what faith meant to them, what it meant to walk in the footsteps of Jesus. If I had a magic wand and could remake worship all over again it would look more like that.

This story from the Gospel of John – Jesus' first sign at Cana – took place at a wedding feast and it leaves us with the same kind of feeling: this is a full meal, a celebration with Jesus at the center of it.

John is an intriguing story teller. He spins stories that operate on many different levels at the same time, replete with all manner of double meanings.

There is the surface of the text, what we would call the plot, and then the deeper spiritual implications beneath it.

The story is a simple one, really. Jesus, his mother and his disciples are guests at a wedding feast. In the middle of it all Jesus' mother shares a hospitality crisis with Jesus: The wine is about to give out. That is no small matter, especially for the hosts. Jesus wonders why she is bothering him with a matter like that and suddenly we begin to notice something more is happening.

Jesus gives some instructions to the steward of the feast and we watch as Jesus turns the water in the large clay pots into wine, and not just any wine but the good stuff. By this time in the story John has worked his magic: We know this isn't just a wedding feast but THE feast that happens every time Jesus is present, the feast where the wine never runs out. This is a communion service. Jesus is guest and host and provider all at the same time. And boy does he provide.

The largesse of his provision is not beside the point; when Jesus provides he really does, like in the feeding of the multitudes when they had to gather up all the leftovers at the end. When Jesus is present the table is full, the plate is full, the cup is full, we are full, everyone is full.

I remember in a former church when Thanksgiving rolled around and we were to have a congregational dinner. One of our Elders, George, stood up in an Elder's meeting and said, "If we are really to give thanks and mean it and really show that God provides we should have a real feast." And then he proceeded to use an old-timey phrase I'd only read in books. He said, "We should meet at the groaning board." What that means is that the wood planks across the saw horses groaned under the weight of the meal that sat upon them. Abundance was all around, a great Thanksgiving.

I remember one of the last times I had an experience like that. I was visiting the Intercultural Center in Chiapas, Mexico and our little team spent a day in one of the indigenous communities.

They received us with such graceful hospitality. **(Image 1)** After we toured their fields they led us to a block home where they had been preparing the mid-day meal for us. As we waited we shared stories of our lives.

(Image 2) First, they came around and washed our hands. And then the food began to come out from the kitchen next door. **(Image 3)** The quantity of food these poor people provided was so very astounding – soup, burritos, rice, chicken, tortillas. After we were fed the rest of the community shared the remaining food among themselves. This was in a very real sense – worship at the table. All the elements were there: prayers, sharing the faith, breaking the bread together.

I had the strong sense that Jesus was in the midst of his people, that there was provision for all, that the ritual of their giving and our receiving was a sign of the kingdom. I have had this same experience numerous times in Central and Latin America, the same generous hospitality, the same sense of Jesus present with his whole beloved family.

(Back to Video) The way that we share the table, the way we extend hospitality, the way we receive the stranger in our midst, defines and shapes us as a people. Whenever Jesus is among those who really love him, there is always enough and the multitudes are fed.

The way we share the table in Christian community reinforces our sense of abundance, that wherever God is present, wherever Jesus walks with us, wherever brothers and sisters share together, there is always enough. What a powerful counter-message to many of our current narratives of scarcity, that there is *not* enough and we should protect everything we have. How different the Christian message is compared to that.

As we take our places as guests at the table in John's wedding feast in Cana we are astounded with the sheer abundance brought forth by Jesus. Imagine, six stone jars that held at least twenty gallons each. That's 120 gallons of wine. Even for a large wedding banquet that is a lot, more than enough.

And that is the point, of course. In the presence of Jesus there is more than enough.

If we feel that we don't have what it takes to meet this challenge ...

If it seems like resources can't possibly meet demand...

If it seems like the power of darkness is too massive for the light of good to prevail ...

If our emptiness seems to have no bottom, our longing no answer ...

Gather around the groaning board of Christ, for he is the vine and we are the branches, always providing what is needed and more, filling the empty places with wine of the spirit. With Christ in the center of gathered kindred souls our deepest needs are met and we become free, truly free – free to love, free to give, free to choose, free to become the persons God has created us to be.