

Epiphany 2 C  
John 2:1-11  
January 16, 2022

“Now is the Time”  
Rev. Dr. Brandon S. Perrine

*On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said to him, ‘They have no wine.’ And Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come.’ His mother said to the servants, ‘Do whatever he tells you.’ Now standing there were six stone water-jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. Jesus said to them, ‘Fill the jars with water.’ And they filled them up to the brim. He said to them, ‘Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward.’ So they took it. When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, ‘Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.’ Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.*

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You have to admit, that’s a really good party trick. In a story that is unique to John’s gospel, Jesus finds himself at a marriage celebration. Like all good weddings, there are libations, well, at least there *were* libations. Apparently, the wine had run out. This is clearly a catastrophe. Whether this wedding was for a member of Jesus’ own family or a close family friend, we’ll never know for sure, but somehow Jesus’ mother, Mary, was

informed that there was nothing left to drink and she took the problem to Jesus. “What concern is that to you and to me?” he responded. “Not my problem.” A bit presumptuously, Mary instructed the servants to do whatever he would tell them.

Jesus noticed six large jars and had them filled with water. Then, he told them to take some of the water to the steward of the feast. When the steward tasted it, he went directly to the groom and said, “Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now!” Whether the steward himself had already had too much to drink and couldn’t tell the difference between wine and water, we’ll never really know. We can, however, infer from this story that whether he wanted to or not, Jesus responded to the perceived urgency of the situation, using what was at hand, and the wedding guests were satisfied.

Tomorrow, we celebrate Martin Luther King Day, in honor of the civil rights leader’s birthday. Doing a bit of reading on the establishment of MLK Day, I was surprised to learn that in Alabama and Mississippi, King’s birth is still celebrated on the same day as that of Confederate general, Robert E. Lee. I don’t think it’s necessary to point out the irony of celebrating these two particular individuals on the same day: one a celebrated leader in the battle for equality and justice, the other a celebrated general in a failed attempt to secede from the union over that same equality and justice. The simple fact that this still happens in our nation is proof enough that there is still work to do in the fight for racial justice.

Perhaps surprisingly, I see a striking parallel between Jesus and the wedding at Cana and the ongoing struggle against racism in America. When Mary delivered the news to Jesus that the drinks were done, his response was: “what concern is that to you and to me?” Unfortunately, that’s too often been the response of white Americans, who recognize that there is a problem in this nation for people of color, but leave it for

someone else to solve. But Jesus didn't walk away, did he? Instead, he did something about it.

Poet Eric Pankey described Jesus' action at that wedding feast poignantly. He wrote:

To take what is closest at hand  
And set a story in motion.

Not to make something from nothing,  
But, as at Cana, to be moved,

Even unwillingly, by need.<sup>1</sup>

He expressively described Jesus as one who is “moved, even unwillingly, by need.” People were thirsty at a wedding—that was definitely a need! And Jesus reluctantly responded—but he did respond. There is a need in our nation today. We are called to overcome our reluctance, to own that it is also our need (and ours to fix), and do something about it.

In his stirring speech at the historic Riverside Church in 1967, addressing a group of some 3,000 clergy and lay people, Martin Luther King, Jr. stated that, “[w]e are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.” He continued:

In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity. The "tide in the affairs of men" does not remain at the flood; it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residue of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: "Too late."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Pankey. "Apocrypha," Knopf, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr. "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence," 1967.

Once again, I'm reminded of the story from John's gospel. For Mary, for the bride and groom and the guests at the party, the need was pressing—the need was now. King's words remind us, almost 54 years after they were first uttered, that now is still the only time we're guaranteed to respond to need. You don't need me to tell you that the *need* is real. Racism is alive and well. White privilege is alive and well. Injustice for people of color in the housing market, the job market, and at the hands of the criminal justice system is alive and well. You don't need me to tell you that the *need* is real. My job is to tell you that the time is now. The time to do something about it is always now. So, what are *we* going to do about it?

Rather than giving you an abstract list of potential action steps to take in solving the problem of racism in America, I'd like to direct your attention to the insert in your worship folder titled "A Caring Challenge for Thinking People." Last September, the Cabinet authorized the creation of Students of the Beloved Community: The Social and Racial Justice Committee of New England Congregational Church. The mission statement of this new committee is as follows:

To continue and expand the work of our church's abolitionist founders by fighting systemic injustice; breaking down walls of separation, advantage or exclusion based on race; and embracing the common humanity of all.

This insert represents a first step in living into this mission. It's an invitation to all the members and friends of the New England Church Community to participate in one of five opportunities for learning and discussion. Each opportunity will last about 30 minutes and there is at least one for every age group.

Today, in response to the real need in our nation, I challenge each of you to do something about it. I challenge you to accept this Caring Challenge for Thinking People as a first step in responding to racism as a community of faith.

When he was confronted by a need at the wedding in Cana, Jesus responded. There is a need in our nation today as the sickness of racism continues to poison neighborhoods and communities and lives. The time to do something about it is now.

May it be so. Amen.