

January 16, 2022
The Second Sunday after Epiphany
Year C
John 2:1-11
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

His Hour Had Come

Last Sunday evening Britton and the kids and I met up with some other folks from Emmanuel in Boston, to see the rock opera, Jesus Christ Superstar, at the Emerson Colonial theater. Last fall the Emmanuel field trip to the theater was announced and a few of us decided to buy tickets to the show. We sat in the balcony, in the seats that were the in the very back and the highest up in the whole theater. The height of our seats was something of a worry for some of us while we waited for the show to begin, some of us had vertigo and thought that they might not be able to make it through the show, one of our group thought he might have to leave. But all that changed when the house lights went down and the first notes of the overture reverberated through the theater. Gone were all thoughts of about how high up we were as we got lost in the story. In fact, we were just about a song and a half into the show when the person who had thought that he might have to leave the theater because of his fear of heights whispered to me, “This is awesome” and just got lost in the music and the old, old, familiar story, told in what still feels like a new way, even though the show was on its 50th anniversary tour.

Jesus Christ Superstar was written by lyricist Tim Rice and composer Andrew Lloyd Webber. Rice was 25 and Lloyd Webber was 21 when they created the show, which is a historically controversial retelling of the passion of Jesus Christ, as seen through the eyes of his betrayer, Judas.

Christians were divided about *Jesus Christ Superstar* from its inception. Even though Rice and Lloyd Webber intended, from the beginning, for the show to be a stage production, they were originally unable to get a producer to back the show, because they were afraid that it would be too controversial to be a hit. They were right about it being controversial, but they were wrong about it not being a hit. The original Broadway production brought plenty of protesters, who felt that the show denied the divinity of Jesus, was irreverent in its tone and style, and implied a physical relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. They were also angry because the show left out the resurrection.

In spite of all of the pushback *Jesus Christ Superstar* has been a hit show for 50 years, which has included more than one movie, four Broadway productions, multiple national tours, and many productions around the world.

The director of the first movie version of *Jesus Christ Superstar* is quoted as saying about the show, “My hope is that audiences will take this for what it is — an opera, not history. These kids are trying to take Jesus off the stained-glass windows and get him down on the street. Some people are not going to like that.” <http://www.newlinetheatre.com/jcschapter.html>

It’s kind of timely that we went to see a show that portrayed Jesus in a very raw and human kind of way a week before this Sunday’s gospel reading, because in some ways, the Jesus who we see here, is a very raw and human Jesus, in a place that is very human, very familiar, very much a part of our experience. After all, how many of you have been to a wedding? How many of you have been to a wedding where something went wrong? I suspect that there’s a reason that so many of America’s Funniest Home videos come from

weddings. In spite of all of the planning that goes into weddings, it's not unusual for something to go wrong.

My mother still talks about a wedding that she attended, the wedding of her cousin, where they simply did not have enough food or drink for all of the guests that they had invited. They really could have used it for Jesus to come to their wedding, bringing with him his ability to multiply food and turn water into wine.

I know someone else who went to the wedding of a friend, a simple affair, which was supposed to be catered by a local deli. She and her husband left church right after the ceremony to make sure that everything was ready for the reception and got there to discover that there was no food at all. The deli had gotten the date of the wedding wrong and hadn't shown up and couldn't show up. They didn't have any food ready. My friend, her husband, and some of the other wedding guests went to work and ran around to local stores and restaurants gathering what they could, so that, by the time the bride and groom arrived at the reception venue after having their wedding pictures taken, there was food for their reception. While they certainly knew that something had gone wrong, the celebration was able to carry on with joy, with laughter, and relief. Imagine how thrilled my friend and the rest who saved the day and the wedding feast felt as they watched their friends, the bride and groom, enjoy their wedding reception! It's fun to be the hero of the story.

It's a very human thing to want to be the hero but apparently, Jesus didn't want to be.

Jesus was at a wedding, a familiar place, a familiar experience for many of us. And he was at a wedding that was going wrong.

In Jesus' time and community weddings were multi-day affairs, multi-day celebrations, and it was the responsibility of the parents of the bride and groom to make sure that there was enough food to feed all of the friends and extended family members and community. Of course, it would have been then, just as it would be today, a source of terrible embarrassment to run out of food and wine at a wedding in Jesus' time, to have to send guests home early, to start a marriage out on the note of scarcity, lack of means or lack of planning to present a full feast and a full celebration.

So, when this calamity happened at the wedding that Jesus was attending with Mary, his mother, and his disciples, Mary figured that Jesus could jump in and be the hero of the story.

I have talked in other sermons recently about the fact that the gospels are largely silent about the life of Jesus between his birth and his baptism. We have one story about him as an adolescent, twelve years old, from the gospel of Luke, but everything else we know about his childhood and early adulthood is speculation and surmise. But the fact that Mary approached Jesus, seemingly with the expectation that he could do something about their hosts' problem indicates that, at the very least, all of the things that she had seen and experienced about his birth and very early childhood, all of the things that she had treasured and pondered in her heart, and perhaps more that were not written down, made Mary think that Jesus had power and could and would use it, in an act of fellowship and compassion for the bride and groom and their parents, who were in need. She seemed to think that it would not be too hard a thing for Jesus to be the hero of this story.

It's the kind of thing that we humans so often like to do. If we have the ability, to be seen to be the problem solver, the one who saves the day?

Perhaps Mary thought that if Jesus solved the problem of the wine running dry at the wedding feast, then she too, by association, would be a hero, for the role that she played in presenting the problem to Jesus in the first place.

But solving the problem that didn't seem to be Jesus' inclination. When Mary approached him with their hosts' problem, "They have no wine," Jesus' reaction wasn't to jump in and save the day. It wasn't to fix the problem and be acknowledged as the hero. Instead, it was to reject the task that his mother was asking him to undertake.

Jesus responded to his mother saying, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come."

It's not the kind of thing that we expect to hear from Jesus. We want Jesus to be the solution, our problem-solver, of problems big and small. When I pray with the Confirmation class and with the Friday Night Live youth and the prayer group, when I pray with anybody and when I pray alone, we pray like God cares about everything that is going on in our lives, every detail. We don't imagine that there are problems and struggles that we have that are beneath God's notice. Because I don't believe that there are. I pray like we can turn to Jesus for anything, for any problem, because I believe that we can.

But here, Jesus initially rejects his mother's call for him to use his power to solve their hosts' problem.

For about 2000 years, since this gospel was written, people have wondered why. Why did Jesus not want to come to the rescue in this situation? Why did he hold back? Why did he reject his mother's initial request that he jump in, that he solve, that he be the hero, that he be the savior of this stressful and embarrassing situation?

One might think that even if Jesus weren't the compassionate savior that he is, simply as a human being, he might want to play a role in the story and save the day.

Mary knew, and Jesus knew that he could solve this problem. But instead, he held back.

In the gospel of John, this is the first time that Jesus has been asked to reveal his power publicly. And perhaps Jesus knew that once he did, once he used his divine power, then the path that he was one would be set, that he would take his first step on the road to Jerusalem. Perhaps warring with a human desire to save the day, was an equally human desire to avoid the inevitable, to avoid taking an action that would start him on a road that would lead to his death. Perhaps Jesus knew that once he took this step and revealed his power that more would be asked of him. That people would start to talk, that crowds would start to gather, that people's expectations of him would rise, that powerful people would start to feel threatened by him, that he would start on his path to the cross and there would be no turning back.

So, in that moment, when Mary called on him, asked him to use his power, in this simple thing, nothing life or death, a wedding going wrong, Jesus' initial reaction was to say no.

That was where he started, but that wasn't where he finished.

Mary, who knew him well, knew that he wouldn't leave their hosts hanging, with a ruined wedding, a ruined celebration, and a pall of embarrassment cast over the marriage of the bride and groom. She didn't rebuke or question Jesus for his answer. She just turned to the servants and said, "Do whatever he tells you."

And in spite of his inclination to delay, Jesus acted.

He had the servants fill six stone water jars, that held twenty or thirty gallons of water each. Once they had done that, he told them to take some of the liquid out of the jars and take it to the chief steward, the one who was running the wedding. When the steward tasted it, it was good wine, better wine than had been served earlier in the wedding. He said to the groom, “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.”

The wedding was saved, the good wine that Jesus had provided flowed, and the celebration continued.

It seems that most of the people at the wedding did not know that the good wine came from Jesus, but some people knew. Mary knew. His disciples knew and they believed in him. And the servants who had filled the stone jars with water and who had drawn out wine knew, and perhaps stories started to be whispered about Jesus, how he had saved the day, how he had done this extraordinary thing.

In Jesus’ reluctance, we find Jesus here, in the Bible, down off of the stained-glass window, a human being struggling with what it meant to be him, to have his calling, to be God’s beloved and chosen one, called to be the savior of the world.

But in this moment, for Jesus, who was fully human and fully divine, his hour had come. He had saved the wedding, but from that moment on, there would be no more quiet anonymity, with his friends and his family.

His hour had come, not because of some preset timing of God, but because Jesus had compassion for a young couple and their parents and those who had gathered for a celebration. Ultimately Jesus’ whole life, the way he

lived it and the way that it ended on a cross on Calvary, would be about compassion, compassion for you, compassion for me, compassion for all of us, and all of creation.

By turning the water into wine Jesus revealed his glory and was set on a path that would take him from being the unsung hero of the wedding to being the savior of the world. Thanks be to God. Amen.