**Nudged Toward Justice**

Isaiah 62:1-5
John 2:1-11

 “Mommmm…..” That’s what Jesus is thinking, but according to John what comes out is “Woman, what concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come.” Admittedly John is writing his Gospel some 80 years or so after this wedding in Cana took place. It is all together possible; maybe even quite likely that what Jesus actually says to his mother, Mary is “Mommm….” We never quite leave behind that parent child relationship, even when we are full grown adults.

 Parents, I would guess moms especially, feel at liberty to encourage, prod, nudge their children, even adult children toward living into their full potential. Caring moms, caring parents see the gifts in their children and they are eager for their children to use those gifts.

 It is fair to assume that at an early age Mary was encouraging Jesus to be all that he could be. Jesus did not feel like forgiving that kid next door who broke the special toy his dad made him in his carpenter shop, but Mary prods and nudges him to do so. Mommmm. Jesus did not feel like sharing the desert his mom made for him, but Mary nudges him and prods him to give some to his brother James. Mommmm. Jesus did not feel like getting involved with that boy who the other kids kept picking on because he was a little different, but Mary nudges him and prods Jesus to stand up for this boy. “Momm….” There were times Jesus would rather play than go to worship or take time for prayer, but Mary kept nudging Jesus about the importance of being open to the holy and the sacred in our lives and world. “Mommm….”

 Now they are at a wedding in Cana and the host has run out wine, which at your house or my house may be a sign to stop drinking. But, in the mid-East, hospitality, especially among the poor, was not only an important social grace, but sometimes a matter of life and death. If a neighbor is in need of a loaf of bread, you share it. If you run out of wine during a wedding it matters, hospitality is what is at stake.

 Mary simply says to Jesus, “They have run out of wine.” That’s all she needs to say. This exchange between Mary and Jesus, with Mary prompting Jesus, nudging Jesus to be all that God would have him be has been going on for a long time. According to John, Jesus responds, “Woman, what concern is that to you and me?” The way it most likely happens, “Mommmm.”

 In John’s Gospel the wedding at Cana miracle where Jesus turns water into wine is the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. You have to wonder, what kind of way is this to begin the ministry of Jesus? Most of us would much prefer the strong and bold beginning given to us by Luke. Jesus strolls into the Synagogue in his home town of Nazareth, opens the scroll to the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of site to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then Jesus sits down and with all eyes fixed on him says, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” Now that is a beginning. It is a role that action stars like Matt Damon or Will Smith would readily play. But, what movie star do we get to play this Jesus who begins his ministry by turning water into wine, nudged by his mom?

 Why does John begin the ministry of Jesus in such an odd way? What is with this need to nudge Jesus? Before we move further into that particular question it is important to note that John has loaded this story about the beginning of Jesus ministry with a great deal of symbolic significance that is hard to miss.

 The nudge which leads to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry happens on the same day as John later tells us the resurrection of Christ occurs. “On the third day there was a wedding in Cana..” Jesus resistance to Mary’s nudge is based on a reference that is repeated again and again in the Gospel of John. “My hour has not yet come”. It is a phrase that John continues employing as a symbolic reference to the full revelation of Jesus’ identity made known in the crucifixion and resurrection awaiting him in Jerusalem. “My hour has not yet come”. In this wedding story, the Chief Steward is surprised that the best wine is saved for last. But, we all know the best wine comes from the one who in John’s Gospel says, “I am the vine”. It is also hard to miss the abundance of wine that is provided by Jesus. Each container holds 20 to 30 gallons. One container would be more than enough, but Jesus provides 6. That’s an incredibly generous amount of wine with which Jesus begins his ministry. This is abundance.

 Of all the symbolic references in this story John gives us, none is more important or consequential than the wedding itself with a metaphorical meaning that goes way beyond the two people getting married: whether bride and groom, bride and bride or groom and groom. John doesn’t give us the gender details.

 In the Hebrew Scriptures wedding is a frequent metaphor for our covenantal relationship with God. Sometimes marriage is utilized to represent brokenness and lack of faithfulness as with the prophet Hosea. At other times marriage represents God’s faithfulness to us as it does in our reading today from Isaiah. But, always marriage stands as a metaphor for the covenant God extends to us. When John says, on the “third day there was a wedding at Cana”, he begins the ministry of Jesus with the full awareness of all that marriage represents in the Hebrew tradition when it comes to our relationship with God.

 We are, however, still left with the question, why does Mary need to nudge Jesus? It might be helpful in answering this question if we reframe our image of who Mary is. Quite often Mary is pictured as a passive, quiet presence, who says “yes” to God and does what’s she told. But, that passive image is a far cry from the picture we are given in Scripture. It is after all Mary who in Luke’s gospel sings out loudly, “My soul magnifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my savior….He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty.” Mary is no passive, submissive woman, sitting off on the sidelines. I look at the mother of Jesus and I see Harriet Tubman, Sojouner Truth, Rosa Parks, Dorothy Day to name a few.

It is quite possible to imagine that Mary has been to Synagogue just prior to the wedding. Mary, after all is a faithful Jew, for whom the stories and the writings of the prophets are a spirit filled guide in her life.

It may well be that just prior to the wedding she heard this passage we read this morning from Isaiah 62. “For Zion’s sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest.” It may be that these verses are all the prodding Mary needs before she in turn nudges Jesus by saying “they have no wine.”

 Mary knows that central to God’s covenant is the promise of God’s liberating justice, a God who stands squarely on the side of the oppressed, the hungry, the poor, the marginalized. It is God who heard the cry of the slaves in Egypt and sets them free from bondage. It is God who through the prophets again and again reminds the people that our covenantal relationship is founded on the abundance of God’s love and justice being made available to everyone. No exceptions. If some people have access to health care and others are denied that is a problem in God’s covenant. If some people get a first rate education while others go to school with inadequate resources that is a problem in God’s covenant. If there is income disparity based on race that is a problem in God’s covenant. If African Americans are being assaulted by police officers in Chicago, New York, Minneapolis, St. Paul that is a problem in God’s covenant. If Indigenous Tribes continue suffering genocidal treatment, denied treaty rights, negation of culture and spiritual traditions that is a problem in God’s covenant. If it is only white actors who are honored with Oscar nominations that is a problem in God’s covenant.

 Our text from Isaiah comes from what is commonly known as third Isaiah. Scholars recognize that Isaiah is more of a tradition of prophets than single person. Third Isaiah is addressed to people who have returned from Exile, but face a monumental rebuilding process and are losing hope. In many ways they are like so many of our congregations that have experienced decline, remember better days, and feel discouraged if not hopeless about the future. Isaiah says there is only one way forward and that is to renew our wedding vows, our covenant with this liberating God of justice. There is no Sunday School program, outreach program, Stephen’s ministry, praise filled worship or anything else that will rebuild on their own the people of God. What is most needed, what is critical than and now is that at the center of our common life, the center of our worship is the liberating justice of God’s covenant.

 It is this God of covenant who through the prophet Isaiah says, “You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married;” Pastors in our African American churches hear these words and they know there is only one response. “Black Lives Matter.” That is not to say other lives do not matter. It is to say whenever people have felt forsaken; shut out and excluded, the resounding word that comes from the God of covenant is you matter, “Black Lives Matter.”

 Mary hears these words from the prophet Isaiah, feels the prod of God’s spirit and she knows remaining silent is not an option and so she says to Jesus “they have no wine.” She doesn’t tell Jesus what to do. She simply speaks the truth. Sometimes that is all that is required. Speak the truth about housing discrimination. Speak the truth about banking practices that favor those who are white and charge higher rates to People of Color. Speak the truth about unequal sentencing practices, unequal representation. Speak the truth about medical care offered to those who are white while denied to others because of the color of their skin. Speak the truth. “They are out of wine.”

 Mary nudges Jesus. But, that really should come as no surprise. Mary is the type of woman who for a long time has had the courage to let her voice be heard. But, more importantly Mary knows that God is a God who continually nudges us toward liberating justice. Just this past week I was attending a meeting on racial justice. I sat next to a young Hmong woman who was telling about a situation where she saw discrimination and then she said “the person with whom I was with nudged me and asked what are you going to do?”

 This liberating, covenant making, marriage vow taking God of justice and liberation nudges us, prods us, calls us to be all that we can be in giving witness to the Realm of God’s justice. It is this nudging God who was at work in our brother, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who we celebrate today. It is this covenant making God who nudged Dr. King to lift his voice, even when he himself was reluctant to do so. It is this nudging God that brought Dr. King to Selma, to Atlanta, to D.C., to Memphis. It is this nudging God that brought Dr. King to Riverside Church in New York City where against the advice of many he spoke out against the war in Vietnam, telling the people, “I have come to this magnificent house of worship tonight because my conscience leaves me no other choices.” God was nudging Dr. King toward justice, just as God continues nudging us to be agents, voices and activists for justice in our day and our time. The work is not done. “They have no wine.” The silence must be broken. The truth must be heard. God is nudging us today, as individuals and as a community of faith. God is nudging us toward justice.

 I take comfort in Jesus response to Mary. “Mommmm.” Sometimes, perhaps often, we feel unprepared, the time does not seem right. And yet, God continues nudging us toward that hour when through and with Jesus, we will see the glory of our God.

**Isaiah 62:1-5**

*Our first Scripture reading comes from what is commonly known as third Isaiah, spoken by a prophet who stands in a line of prophets who follow the prophetic tradition of Isaiah. Earlier Isaiah prophets spoke to people before the exile and during the exile. Third Isaiah speaks to people who have returned from Exile but now face the discouraging proposition of rebuilding the ruined city. Third Isaiah, like prophets before, draws upon the metaphor of a marriage in reminding the people that the God of liberation and justice has not forsaken them and will lead them to a new day.*

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her vindication shines out like the dawn, and her salvation like a burning torch. The nations shall see your vindication, and all the kings your glory; and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will give. You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God. You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate; but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married;
for the Lord delights in you, and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

**John 2:1-11**

*Like Isaiah our reading from Isaiah, our Gospel lesson today is centered around a marriage celebration. For John, it is the unplanned beginning of Jesus ministry. Jesus attends the wedding expecting to be just another case. Yet, thanks to the nudging and prompting of his mom, the wedding becomes the occasion when in John’s Gospel, the ministry of Jesus begins.*

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.