

## **A Space of Abundance**

Let us pray: “Dear God, as we come to worship you today, may the words of my tongue, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable to you, who is our rock and our redeemer. Amen.”

As a significant event in our lives, weddings are well prepared and take a lot of effort to make it happen. The preparation time could take weeks; but in most cases it will take months or even a year to organize a wedding. Attending a wedding is to witness the couple making a commitment with each other: a commitment of love, respect, support, and life together.

In a traditional Chinese wedding, the couple will bow three times to honor the commitment. The first bow is for the heaven and the earth, because the spiritual core of Chinese culture believes in the harmony between heaven, earth and human. The second bow is for the parents, which shows the thanksgiving and respect for both of the couples’ parents. Finally, the third bow is for the couple, this time they will turn to each other and bow to each other. I think it is very interesting how different cultures express the same core value for wedding: the commitment is made not only between each party; it also involves the participation of families and friends, but most importantly, the sacred one.

In today’s Gospel, Jesus was invited to a wedding in Cana and this was also known as the very first sign that Jesus performed a miracle, where he turned water into wine.

Weddings during Jesus’s day were weeklong festivals. Banquets would be prepared for many guests, and the week would be spent celebrating the new life of the married couple. Often the whole town was invited and everybody would come. To accommodate so many people, careful planning was needed. Just as how we see weddings are well prepared today. We prepare it down to every detail, and many times we would run a rehearsal to make sure all these details come together perfectly.

But trust me, no matter how well you have prepared, not everything would come out as it was planned. There will always be something that we missed. Sometimes the flaws are hardly noticed and other times they are very apparent. Sometimes the mistakes that occur can be quite humorous and other times they can be quite embarrassing.

Luckily, Jesus encountered a pretty embarrassing one. The people who came from all over town were in this big wedding party and there was no wine. Now I have a question for you: Do you think that Jesus at some point knew the wedding would run out of wine? Second question, did you think he planned to help? Probably not because when Mary asked Jesus for help, he replied with, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." Which I think it's a pretty harsh way to say no. Last question, what if Mary didn't ask Jesus for help? Would they solve the problems? Maybe yes (to buy more wine or provide some cookies) maybe simply apologize if they couldn't find other ways to make up the lack of wine.

In this story, the Bible didn't mention anything about why this situation happened. Is that because they didn't prepare well enough? Maybe yes, maybe no. However, I believe that in such an important event in their lives, they must put in a lot of effort to prepare. Yet, as we know that in this well-prepared wedding, some emergency situation occurred out of their plan.

Were there things that we prepared well but didn't turn out as we planned? Of course yes! Take my first sermon for example, I prepared a 30-minute sermon at the Chinese congregation, but luckily I ran through the whole sermon within 15 minutes. I believe that all of us must have some similar feelings before. We all hate the feeling when the unexpected happen on us. Maybe you are pretty unhappy because "This is NOT my plan!" Or maybe you are very positive and tell yourself, "It is ok, I tried very hard and I believe I can do better next time." Or it could also be in a neutral thinking that "Well, even though things didn't go in the direction I wanted but I'm okay with it and It's not the end of the world."

No matter how well we plan, things will not always turn out as we have planned. **Sometimes, the unexpected situation, the missing parts of our plan is the very space where we encountered God, and in that space, God's miracle reveal.**

In that space, Jesus turned water into wine; the abundant grace was first shown to the world. The message that I want you to take home today is the **willingness of leaving a space for God in our plans.** The question for us is: are we willing to leave a SPACE for God in a well-planned situation? Are we willing to leave a space for God in our strive for perfectionism? Are we willing to leave a SPACE for God where we can say it is ok to fail? Are we willing to leave a SPACE for God in our busy schedules? Are we willing to leave a SPACE for God where he can appear in our lives? Are we willing to leave a SPACE for God where he can turn what we lack into abundance?

Every Tuesday morning, we will have a Hope staff meeting and there will always a devotion time before we start to talk about other things. Two weeks ago when Nick was leading the devotion, he shared a very good story about his own space for God. He mentioned that often times during the busy day, he would simply stop all the work he is doing at that moment and let himself meditate and focus on God before returning to work. The few minutes of meditation time is the space where he leaves for God everyday.

This weekend some of our ladies went to the Women's Retreat, the theme for this year is "Dancing With the Divine." As the organizer Ann and Beata described, this is the very place where we can "connect deeply with the Divine – in God, within ourselves, and within others."

This week we will lift up two groups in our congregation. One is the Hope Trust team. This team provides opportunity through our generous giving to "support special ministries both at Hope and in the world beyond our walls." Another group we will give thanks for is the Communion Servers team. Each week, this group help to set up, serve, as well as to clean up for our Holy Communion.

As a congregation, we encounter God in that very space of supporting and serving for each other.

Last but not least are the questions:

What are the spaces that I can leave for God?

How can I make it happen?

Amen!