

What Does It Matter?

(John 2:1-11)

Sermon delivered by The Very Rev. Matt Rhodes at Christ Church, Millwood, Virginia
Second Sunday after the Epiphany, January 20, 2019

In the name of the one God, creator, redeemer, and sustainer. Amen.

One of the things I love most about this morning's reading from the Gospels is the location at which we see the first of the signs performed by Jesus.

It is a party.

There is something wonderful about the image of Jesus in the midst of a celebration, sharing in the joy of a wedding with his disciples and mother and other friends. The tradition of that time held that the ceremony and feast would not have been held in a single day, as is the style to which we are accustomed. The celebration would have lasted **seven** days, a weeklong feast at the home of the groom during which people would have continually been coming and going.

Some of the guests would have been there from beginning to end. Whenever new guests arrived, blessings for the bride and groom would have been repeated. We have no way of knowing exactly when Jesus and his group showed up, but the festivities would have likely been well underway ... perhaps for several days at that point. So it is not surprising that the supplies for the guests were running low ... and running out.

Not having enough wine to entertain the guests would have been incredibly problematic for the groom. He was "facing a potential social stigma that could make him the talk of his guests for years to come."¹ There were few things more important than being a good host ... of inviting as many people as possible to the celebration and being able to take care of them. This would have been a well-known expectation, and I think it was out of concern for the possible embarrassment of the host that Mary informed Jesus that the wine was running low.

On the surface, his response was quite surprising: *Woman, what concern is that to you and to me?* For someone who answered the call of so many during his ministry, who addressed the needs of so many who reached out to him in their desperation, Jesus' response seems out of character. He does not seem to want to act to help someone whose need has been pointed out. Why?

He continued: *My hour has not yet come.* In his response to Mary, Jesus was making it known that he "must be guided by his inner calling from God ... and not by any human claim or

¹ Craig S. Keener. *The Gospel of John: A Commentary, Vol. I*, p. 502.

authority.”² Despite his response, Mary asked the servants to do whatever Jesus asked of them. In this moment, with this request, Mary continued to act not necessarily from a place of obligation, but from a place of *faith*.

As I thought about all of this (and there are *many* places I could have gone with this rich text), I kept circling back to Jesus’ question. *What concern is that to you and to me?* I began to think about it within the context of faith and acting in God’s time. And I began to think of it not as a question Jesus is posing to Mary, but one that Jesus poses to *us* ... *every day*. And through that question, our own inner calling from God takes root.

Among everything else that makes this creation so beautiful and the human family of which we are all part so magnificent, there is much that is problematic. There are issues of division ... of hatred ... of discontent. Differences that might otherwise be embraced are trampled upon. We see instances when people who are suffering are ignored ... when people who are belittled find no support ... when people who are lost are left to wander.

It is easy to pin these and many other responses on differences of ideology, or politics. I refuse to do so. The knife of indifference cuts in many directions and slices through any spectrum. No, I pin this on the refusal of some to seriously consider the question that Jesus asked Mary and that is still being asked of us this morning: *What concern is that to you and to me?*

There is a powerful moment in the Scrooge and Marley scene of *A Christmas Carol*, when Scrooge says to the ghost standing before him, “But you were always a good man of business, Jacob.” And Marley responds, “Business! Mankind was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence were all my business!”³ Marley had learned too late the answer to the question we are considering this morning: *What concern is that to you and to me?*

When someone in our family is suffering or experiencing a difficult time, we too feel it. We feel their pain and we try to ease their burden. Should we not display the same empathy and support for those in the wider human family experiencing their own pain? Should we not look at something happening to a brother or sister in God’s family and say “*That* is a concern to me”?

I am thankful each day to see the ways that you answer that question ... the ways that you see something and accept it *as* a concern of yours. I have heard from many who are grateful for the love and care you extend. A welcome at the front door on Sunday mornings. Support at our pantry. Companionship at the WATTS night. There are undoubtedly many other ways you show your concern of which I will never be aware.

So to you, even as we consider all of these other things, I would say this: even as Jesus asks that question of us, how can we find ways to ask it of others? How can we extend the network of

² Ernest Hess, “John 2:1-11: Homiletical Perspective.” *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol. 4*, p. 263.

³ Charles Dickens, quoted from *A Christmas Carol*. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/123357-but-you-were-always-a-good-man-of-business-jacob>

support for other children of God by simply asking someone else the question we should carry with us each day: *What concern is that to you and to me?*

Amen.