

Grace to you and peace from God, our Creator, and from our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

¹On October 26 last year, a group of Buddhist monks – and their dog, Aloka – began a journey called Walk for Peace. Their starting point was their center in Fort Worth, Texas, and their destination is the White House. They will walk a total of 2300 miles. Today is Day 78, and they are on their way from Columbia, SC to Ridgeway, SC where they'll stop for the night.

They have a support vehicle and police escorts. Sometimes the monks wear shoes while they walk and sometimes they don't. It depends on the weather and other conditions. Aloka is being checked out by veterinarians along the way who are donating their time and services. And he is also given mandatory rest days where he rides in the support vehicle instead of walking – which he does not like because he wants to be with his people.

When they stop for lunch and again for the night, the monks are greeted by people from all walks of life. Some are there to receive a blessing and prayer cord. Some are there simply to honor the sacredness of what the monks are doing.

I don't know if this story has made the national news or not. There's so much other stuff going on that movements like this tend to get pushed aside, even when they're most needed.

But events, movements, stories like this – I think we agree that they're things we all need. And so, when they don't seem to be happening, we look for them. We make space for them in our hearts and in our lives so that the "other stuff" doesn't fill us up.

When Jesus turned the water into wine at Cana, it was very early on in his public ministry. He'd just called the disciples. They'd begun to hear about Jesus; John the Witness had testified to who he was. And when they asked Jesus where he was staying, he simply said, "Come and see." And they did.

As their belief in Jesus began to take root, he promised that they would see even "greater things" (1:50) than they already had. And in the story we read today, we begin to discover what that means.

Weddings in biblical times were momentous occasions. They were celebrations for the whole community. They lasted about a week and included not just the wedding

¹ <https://dhammadaciya.com/walk-for-peace-departure-ceremony/>

ceremony, but also speeches and dancing, people coming and going. And wine. Lots of wine.

²For celebrations like that, wine was more than just a festive beverage. It was a sign of the harvest – a sign of God’s abundance, of joy and gladness and hospitality. So, to run short on wine was to run short on blessing. And to have it run out altogether was a catastrophe.

As I mentioned at the beginning of worship, this story is unique to John’s gospel. It doesn’t appear in Matthew, Mark, or Luke. And in this gospel, the miracles Jesus performs are never called miracles; they’re called signs. Because the miracles themselves aren’t what we’re supposed to get caught up in. Their intent is to point people to Jesus, to reveal who he is.

So, like a road sign that points to what’s ahead of us, Jesus changing water into wine is a sign that life, joy, and salvation have arrived in abundance.

That detail of abundance can’t be overlooked. Six water jars, each holding 20-30 gallons, filled to the brim, of the best wine. By itself, the amount is extraordinary.

To help us visualize it, I asked Kurt to set up a prop. It’s a 35-gallon Rubbermaid trash bin. So, a little larger than the 30-gallon stone jars Jesus had. A little lighter, too. I always round the number up to 30-gallons, because in this gospel – as we will learn – Jesus is all about abundance.

We first hear it in John ch1, that in Jesus we have all received grace upon grace. The abundance continues in the other signs, the other miracles, of healing. And in ch10, Jesus himself says that he came that we might have life and have it abundantly.

In Cana at the wedding, six stone jars about this size were filled to the brim with the best wine. But it wasn’t about the wine. It was about abundance. An abundance of grace, and life, and love. In total, 180 gallons’ worth.

That’s a lot. And it’s what Jesus fills us with.

³We live in a time when people are so filled with anger or frustration or fear, or even a feeling of helplessness, that it’s sometimes tough to imagine being filled with something good. But that’s what makes it so important, and even urgent, to find ways to make room for the abundance that Jesus offers.

² <https://www.workingpreacher.org/dear-working-preacher/learning-to-tell-time>

³ <https://narrativealive.org/filled-to-the-brim/>

And so we ask: what we are going to let ourselves be filled with? Will it be hatred and conflict, or indifference? Or will we leave space, make space, for something more – and find ways to keep our hearts open?

Theologian Marcia Broucek reminds us that in order for something to be filled, it must first be empty. Or there at least needs to be room for something more. As people of faith, at a minimum, we need space for light to break through.

And we know that light only needs the smallest of openings to illuminate a space. Even a crack will do.

And if the minimum is just a crack for the light to get in, then the maximum is space for love – room for caring and happiness and hope. Room for the abundance that Jesus offers.

When we make space for that, the other stuff has to give way. When we make space for the abundance of Jesus, it means there's no room for violence, hatred, oppression, or war. It means that the fear and anxiety we feel about all that's going on in our nation and our world are enveloped in the love and life of Jesus.

It doesn't mean we ignore what's going on – we absolutely have to pay attention to it and feel the emotions that come with it. We don't deny any of it. But when we make space for the abundance of Jesus to fill us, we acknowledge that if we don't, the "other stuff" can and will fill us up. But it isn't all there is.

Because we also acknowledge that Jesus gives us more. We only need to make space for it.

As Lutherans, we most tangibly receive the abundance of Jesus through the sacraments. When we receive Communion, with every bite of bread and every sip of wine or grape juice, we receive 180 gallons of the grace and life and love of Jesus.

It fills us. It becomes part of us. And it helps us open our hearts to receive more.

In order for something to be filled, it must first be empty. Changing water into wine at Cana wouldn't have had the same impact if there'd still been wine available. It had to run out first. Only then could people begin to understand who Jesus was and what he gives.

We, too, must be emptied in order to receive the abundance of Jesus. We must empty ourselves of hatred and resentment, and the desire for violence, and the temptation to be indifferent. Only then will there be space for what Jesus gives.

Only then can we recognize that he gives us life and love and grace in abundance. That that's what he fills us with. 180 gallons' worth.

Thanks be to God! Amen.