

Ready or Not

A Sermon for Sunday Morning Worship
Annual Meeting Sunday
United Congregational Church of Westerly, UCC
January 27, 2019 – 3rd Sunday after Epiphany
Text: John 2:1-11

“Ready or not, here I come!” Remember how those words in the midst of Hide & Seek could send shivers of excitement down your spine as a kid? Had you hidden well enough? Would the person who was “it” come toward you or head in the opposite direction giving you a chance to make a break for home base and a chance to win the game? Of course, the words are not limited to a game of hide & seek. We have much the same feeling when graduating from high school or college and heading out into the real world for the first time. “Ready or not, world, here I come!” That first day of a new job, the one you’d been anticipating and preparing for all the way through school, is one of the most exciting moments in life. Would the job be everything you hoped it would be? Had you made the right choices that landed you here? Would you find yourself on the career path you’d been envisioning, or not? Were you in fact ready for the world and, perhaps even more importantly, was the world ready for you?

Hard as it may be to imagine, Jesus too had his own “ready or not, here I come” moments as he embarked on the ministry God intended for him. Each of the Gospels handles this moment

differently, although they all agree that the real demarcation of the beginning of Jesus' ministry was his baptism in the Jordan by John at the age of about 30. Matthew, Mark and Luke also agree that immediately following his baptism, he headed out into the wilderness for 40 days and nights as a preparation for what his life doing God's work would be like in the days and years ahead. These three Gospels part company, however, in describing what he did when he returned from the wilderness. In Matthew, he sets about gathering disciples and begins his ministry of teaching and healing. In Mark, he also gathers disciples and then heads to the synagogue in Capernaum where he teaches "with authority" and casts out an unclean spirit from a man in the synagogue. In Luke, he returns from the wilderness and goes to the synagogue in his hometown of Nazareth where he again teaches only this time what he says so enrages the members of his hometown synagogue that they drove him out of town. Yikes!

Only in John does Jesus proceed from his baptism by John to the gathering of his disciples to the miracle at the wedding in Cana. There is no trip into the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights in John's Gospel. Instead, Jesus goes with his mother to what was most likely a family wedding. His disciples, at least the ones he had gathered so far, go with him. Important to note here is that weddings in Jesus' time were multiple day affairs with large quantities of food and wine being consumed. The wedding

was a unique opportunity for the family to show off their position in society, including the financial ability to throw a heck of a party. So, when Jesus' mother (note, John never names her as Mary) notices the wine is giving out, she goes to Jesus and tells him about it. As would be the case with most 30 year-old sons being told something like this by his mother, Jesus responds to her rather sharply. "Woman, what concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come."

Now this is a very interesting response. The first part – what concern is that to you and me – that sounds about right. A 30 year old guy at a social event like this wedding does NOT want his mother coming up to him in the midst of all his friends and asking him to do something about some problem he thinks is none of his business. Okay, fine. But then, his next statement to her is quite curious: "My hour has not yet come." What does that mean? Is he acknowledging here that he knows he could do something about it – like turn water into wine – if he wanted to, but he's not ready to do it? Sure sounds like that's what he's saying. But why wouldn't he be ready? What would he have been waiting for? A more impressive miracle, like healing someone or raising someone from the dead? Or was he shy, not wanting to do something so dramatic in front of people he knew – people who had known him since he was a little boy? Or was he worried that this wasn't the kind of miracles God had been thinking about as Jesus' growing

awareness of his unique call from God became clearer as he grew into mature adulthood? The truth is, we just don't know why he said what he said, or what he meant by it. All we can do is look at what happens next in the story.

Immediately after this testy exchange with Jesus, his mother goes to the chief steward and tells him to do whatever Jesus tells him to do. So, even though Jesus might not have felt ready to act, his mother was confident he would. Why? I think, quite simply, it was because this is a mother who knew her son better than anybody, perhaps even better than he knew himself. In any case, soon after, Jesus did go to the servants and instructed them to fill up the large empty water jars that had held the water for the Jewish purification rites of ritual washing that the guests would have completed as they arrived for the wedding. Once the servants had refilled the water jars, he instructed them to draw some out and take it to the chief steward who tasted it and immediately brought the bridegroom over to compliment him for saving the best wine for last. Interesting to note is that neither the chief steward nor the bridegroom knew what Jesus had done. Only the servants who refilled the water jars knew. We can guess that the servants did not keep this miracle a secret for long. In any event, John is clear in saying that this was the way in which Jesus chose to "reveal his glory" as John puts it meaning this was how Jesus revealed unique relationship with God and, because of

this miracle, the disciples believed in him. Note that the text says they believed *in* him, not that they believed him. That's because for the disciples, this event cemented for them that Jesus was at the very least someone very special to God, perhaps even the long awaited messiah.

I thought this story about Jesus would be an excellent one for us to consider as we head into our Annual Meeting after worship this morning. Several of the points it makes are particularly relevant to the work we need to accomplish this morning in the Meeting. First, it reminds us that even Jesus wasn't sure he was ready for the work God had put in front of him in the moment. He knew there was a problem at the wedding and he apparently knew he had the skills to address it, but he wasn't at all sure he wanted to do it, that he was ready to do it, that he felt like doing it. Sound familiar?

Second, it reminds us that someone else – Jesus' mother – recognized that he had the skill set needed to address a particular situation in the moment. She was confident if she pointed out the problem to him, he would know what to do and he would do it, even if he wasn't happy about it, at least at first. This is an especially important point for us to remember as we discuss the work of the church for the year ahead. If you have insights to share, don't be afraid to share them! Your perspectives and insights are uniquely yours and perhaps God has given you a

unique insight to share with the rest of us. If God is “putting something on your heart” today, don’t be afraid to say it. But, do remember that anything that needs to be said must be said simply and kindly. Jesus’ mother didn’t lecture him. She merely shared an observation and trusted that Jesus would act. She did then lend an assist by telling the servants to be ready to help. And, as we know so well in this church, there is always something requiring someone’s assistance to be move forward. The lesson for us here is that God doesn’t want us to be shy about lending a hand. It takes all of us to be the church together, to accomplish what we know God is calling us to do as a church.

Third, we should note that this miracle Jesus was reluctant to perform and his mother was sure he would, happened in the midst of a family gathering. Jesus and his mother knew these people, they cared about these people and, in the end, I think that’s why Jesus did what he did. He didn’t especially want to for reasons we don’t really know. But he did it because it needed doing for people he cared about, and he knew he could do it. It most likely wasn’t how he envisioned “revealing his glory” as John would put it. But, he did it anyway, because it needed doing. It saved the wedding festivities from an embarrassing end preserving a uniquely special moment for the bride and groom. In the grand scheme of things, this miracle wasn’t all that. He didn’t heal someone of some awful disease. He didn’t raise someone

from the dead. He didn't spark a huge discussion on God's expectations in the moment. Jesus just turned some water into wine so a celebration could continue. And that's pretty awesome.

So, as worship concludes shortly and we get ready to engage in the important work of the Annual Meeting of this congregation of Christ's followers, I hope you will see this annual gathering as the celebration of our life and ministry together that it is. I also hope you'll be open to the Spirit's nudging as we consider the open slots on some of our boards and committees. The simple truth is that we need people power to move forward for the exciting ministry we can accomplish together in the year ahead. Many of you have already stepped up and signed up to share the load of work here in the church and I thank you for that, as does every member of the church leadership. To those of you who haven't yet done so, I hope you will prayerfully consider lending a hand by filling one of the empty slots on our "People Plan for 2019."

Dear friends, like Jesus' mother at the wedding, I am confident God has much rewarding and important work in store for us in the coming year. God is inviting each of us to be ready to make a difference, in our community and in our own lives, through the life and faith and service we practice together here in our wonderful church. I leave you with a thought which came my way many years ago. I don't know where it comes from, but I

really love the sentiment it conveys as we each consider how we are called to be part of the life of this church. “No one can do everything, but everyone can do something.” After all, that’s what makes a church, a church. Amen.