

Chapel Hill United Church of Christ

Sunday Sermon

# God's Extravagance

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

Rev. Dr. Galen E. Russell III  
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*“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.”*

Prayer: God of holy provisions, please lavishly shower upon us everything we need, so that we may declare your wonderful works in everything we do. In Christ we pray, Amen.

Over the Christmas holidays, I had the good fortune of seeing the movie *Blind Side* with Sandra Bullock. Sandra Bullock plays Leigh Anne Tuohy, a Tennessee woman who has a huge heart. In a scene that has similar characteristics to our story of Jesus today, Leigh Anne Tuohy and her family are driving home on a cold, rainy night when they see “Big Mike,” a very big, but very shy high school student walking by himself in the rain, wearing his only outfit, shorts and a summer shirt. They stop and ask “Big Mike” if he was alright and where he was going. He says, “To the gym.” As that brief conversation ends, the Tuohy’s start to drive away, and within seconds, Leigh Anne is affected by Big Mike’s predicament, and she says to her family in the car, “What is he wearing? It’s below freezing.” And Leigh Ann prevails upon her husband, Sean, “Stop the car!” After a mild protest, Sean stops the car, and Leigh Anne gets out. She walks up to Big Mike, asks him if he has a

place to stay for the night. He said, “No.” Back in the car, Sean says to his son, “I’ve seen that look on your mother’s face before.” It was a very determined look, like nothing was going to stop her. She saw a predicament, and prevailed upon her husband to help her do something about it.

The similarities to today’s Bible story with Jesus at the wedding where the wine ran out is that Mary sees a predicament that the host of the wedding is in, and she prevails upon Jesus to do something about it. The predicament of having not enough wine is not only embarrassing, but it’s a social faux pas for the host. So, Mary, knowing that Jesus has the special capability to do something about it, simply says to Jesus, “They have no wine.” Jesus, in an apparent and uncharacteristic lack of concern puts up a mild protest and asks why this is an issue that he should have to worry about. But the look on his mother’s face said to him that he, above all others, could do an extraordinary thing. And, that extraordinary action that would reveal God’s extravagant power. Still protesting, Jesus says, “My hour has not yet come.” Now, you know how moms can have an insistent look on their faces?... the look that says, “you KNOW what is the right thing to do.” And, I can imagine Jesus gives in, nods his head. Mary smiles and says to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” And, Jesus gives instructions, the miracle occurs, and water is turned into wine... not just any ol’ wine, mind you, this is the good wine—the highest quality wine. The best is saved for last!

That is a marvelous message for us today. God's miraculous, saving, life-transforming grace that each of us receives by accepting Jesus Christ as our personal Savior in our hearts is God's gift of the highest quality! It is reflective of God's extravagant nature! God's saving grace is offered to us today—it is the best wine saved for last.

Each of us can live a transformed life when we drink of this 'best wine.' Metaphorically, our lives can change from being just plain water to the highest quality wine. No longer shall we understand ourselves as being "forsaken" or "desolate." As transformed people, we understand ourselves as people who are named a new name by God, a name that says "You are my Delight." We have a new relationship with God, kind of like a newly married couple!

And, in this new relationship, we are to become a reflection of God's highest quality, God's extreme extravagant nature; we become reflective of God's holy love to others, especially when they are in difficult situations.

You know as well as I do that we encounter situations almost every day where we can show the amazing reality of God's extravagance. There are difficult predicaments all around us, and you could be the one person who shows God's extravagant love in that situation. We're called to reflect God's extravagance 24/7. Day in and day out.

Honestly, though, I get tired of it sometimes. Do you? I remember being on vacation in Iceland a few years ago, and a terrible tragic accident occurred in that one of the women in our group was too close to the waves crashing on the shore. A rogue-ish wave, much larger than all the rest, came in and hit this woman unaware, knocked her down, and dragged her out to sea. After some futile rescue efforts, it was clear she was lost. And in the next few moments, I heard the words, “Galen, they need a prayer service.” In my head, I protested—and all these excuses popped into my mind. “I am on vacation. I don’t know these people. I’m not their pastor. They don’t even know I am a pastor. I don’t even know the woman.”

But, I’m a Christian. I know God’s extravagant nature. I know of God’s love for humanity for us, when we celebrate life and when we mourn in death. I know how whenever God enters a life, that life is transformed. I also knew of that family’s predicament. They just lost their loved one to the ocean. I heard the words, “They need a prayer service,” and so, I spoke of God’s extravagant love, right there on the beach, with the drowned woman’s daughter and niece, and a few others. I prayed to God, our Shepherd, our God who saves the best for last for each of us.

You see, all of us have God’s extravagant nature in us. We live in it everyday. I just wish Christians everywhere would reflect that extravagance. I know, for

example, that there are Christian politicians in Washington D.C. I would guess that most claim Christianity as their religious preference, which means God's extravagant saving grace should be front and center in their lives. God's extravagant nature should be the guiding light in perceiving and understanding the great issues of our day.

Just the same way that Jesus heard Mary's simple words, "They have no wine, do something about it." Concerning the predicament of health care, our politicians are hearing simple words regarding approximately 40 million plus people, "They have no health insurance." Do something about it. Concerning those approximately 12 million people who are living in the United States as illegal immigrants, our politicians are hearing the words, "They don't have a safe, efficient, verifiable means of acquiring legal citizenship." Fix that. Concerning the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the simple words are, "People on all sides are dying." End the war. Concerning those in our country who are not heterosexual, our politicians are hearing the simple words, "They don't have the same rights." Take care of that.

Here at Chapel Hill UCC, we have God's grace as a part of our daily experiences of life. Concerning the terrible earthquake in Haiti, all of us, not just our politicians, but all of us hear the simple words, "They need help." We live in

the greatest country ever! We have resources. We have God's grace. Because we have God's grace and these resources, we respond, even if we don't feel like it, even if we come up with excuses not to contribute.

Concerning homeless people who live under bridges and railroad trestles and long ago abandoned buildings less than ten minutes from here, we hear the words, "They have no homes. They have no food to eat. No blankets to keep warm." All of us can be delighted that four of our youth and three of our advisors, last Friday night, went out with Bethesda Mission and responded to the words, "They have no homes." Oh yes, we did hear the excuses from several others in our group who didn't come to our Lock-In and were not a part of our Mission trip. But, eight of us went out from 8:30 p.m. to midnight, handing out food, coffee, blankets, socks, t-shirts, underwear, and even a belt to people like Art who lives in an abandoned warehouse which he legally owns due to an old "Squatters Rights" law. We saw couches arranged in a square under Market Street bridge where the wind whips through "like a wind tunnel," one man said. We saw Francis who lives under a mound of sleeping bags under the railroad trestle and was more concerned about the people in Haiti than his own predicament.

God's extravagant nature, God's highest quality gift of saving grace in Jesus Christ I believe has to be reflected from Christians in all areas, all vocations, all

professions, whenever we see the predicaments that others are in. Whenever human rights are not being held up, whenever the love of money takes center stage, whenever selfish ambitions are put on top and fair and just treatment for others is put aside, as Christians we must never be so holy that we forget to assist others.

Humanity's predicaments are abundant—each one invites us to keep reshaping, keep reforming, keep designing ways to show God's extravagant nature. Like the lyrics of our closing hymn say, "In the midst of changing ways, give us still the grace to praise." May we rise to the challenges of letting God's extravagance be always first and foremost in our lives and in the way we handle our situations and predicaments. Let us stand and sing. Amen.