

I have one very vivid memory of a time when I unexpectedly and entirely unintentionally offended my grandma. This was my mom's mom, my Grandma Zorn, who generally was fairly calm and relaxed with her grandkids. The only time I really remember her yelling at us or getting frustrated was when my cousin Kendall and I would go in her backyard and throw the walnuts that had fallen to the ground at the tree. That annoyed her to no end, but that's no comparison to this one moment.

I don't remember how old I was, probably fifteen or sixteen, and we were in my mom's car, driving her home from I don't remember where, but we were in the center of town getting ready to turn left by the pizza place. See? I told you the memory was vivid. My mom and I were talking about something, and I called my mom by her first name... It was something that I've done for a long time, and only on scant occasions when we're either being playful or I'm giving her grief. When my mom and I are in that mood, I will sometimes give her a solid, "Shirl..." to the point that that's actually what my best friend from college calls my mom. Any time she asks about her, it's not, "How's your mom?" it's "How's Shirl?" I don't think I have ever called my mom Shirley, it's always a teasing, Shirl or Shirl Burl, but oh man, the one time I did that in front of my grandma. Whoa. I said it so casually and without thinking and it made my grandma react faster than I

can ever remember her reacting. She was *ticked* and shocked, because there was *no reason* why I should ever call my mom by her first name. To her it was disrespectful and rude and I remember sitting in the back seat entirely ashamed and called out because the last person you ever want to tick off is your grandma, right? Now, I will whole-heartedly admit, I still do this with my mom, but let me tell you, never again did I do it in front of my grandma, and as I read our gospel this week, I kept wondering just what exactly Jesus' grandma would think if she was within earshot of this little exchange that happens between Jesus and his mother in the middle of this wedding.

There's so much going on in our gospel this morning, that it becomes one of those that is fun to play around with in your mind and imagine the dynamics of what's happening. I mean this seems like a fairly hopping party. Lots of people, lots of excitement, wine clearly flowing, and you can imagine that for Jesus and the disciples this mostly feels like...fun. They're young guys who have just all kind of met and formed their own little clique and they get to go to this party together. You can picture them in the corner all talking and laughing, developing their dynamics together. Maybe some of them are wallflowers and some are the life of the party, but you just get the sense that this is a bunch of friends enjoying themselves. Until...well, the party grinds to a screeching halt.

In Ancient Israel, to run out of wine in the middle of a wedding, weddings that generally were multiday extravaganzas, would have brought deep shame upon the hosting family, and in a culture that was built on honor and shame dynamics this would have been a huge problem. Enter into the story, the mother of Jesus. Not Mary in John's gospel, simply the mother of Jesus. You can imagine her walking over to Jesus in the midst of his throng of disciples, pulling him aside, and being like umm, they've run out of wine. Now we have no idea why Mary cares about this. We don't know if these are relatives, friends, people that she wants to protect from shame and embarrassment, what we do know is that she cares enough to want Jesus to do something about it. Even more important she *knows* Jesus can do something about it. In the middle of a wedding about to go off the rails, Mary knows that if anyone can fix this, her son, the Messiah can. Cue the conversation that I imagine would make my grandma cringe.

Mary tells Jesus of the predicament going on and Jesus responds, "Woman, what is that to me?" I want you all to imagine saying that sentence to your mother. Now, we don't really know the tone that it gets said in, maybe like me and my mom, this is Mary and Jesus' thing, it's said with a sweet, kind of teasing lilt or it could be said how it sounds, a little snarky, a little off-handed, a little like, *Mom*, I am with my friends! Go

away! But there's something else lingering here...Jesus also tells her, my hour has not yet come, and suddenly the dynamics shift a little bit and you start to wonder. How many times have Jesus and Mary had this conversation? Something happens and Mary wonders if this is the time when her son finally steps into his role as the Messiah. A moment occurs and all those things Mary stored up and pondered in her heart come pouring out because she knows eventually her son is going to need to go out into the world and tackle the major problems within it. You wonder...has Mary been trying to push Jesus out into the world and he's had moments of resistance? Moments of fear, anxiety, uncertainty, hesitation? Has Mary done what mothers have done from the beginning of time, tried to prod her child forward to be who she knows he can be, even if that is going to be hard work and ask for the near impossible?

You start to hear lying behind this conversation a little nudge of... Son, it is time. You have your disciples. You're 30 years old. The world is falling apart. People need God, people need *you*. It's time to go to work. You can't stay in the carpenter shop forever, the world needs you. Suddenly, you wonder if Jesus' offhand tone belies his nervousness, like, am I really ready to start this? Am I really ready to make myself known? Is he trying to brush her off because he's still trying to delay what he knows he

must do? Is he sassy to try and stop the conversation in its tracks so that he can have one more day of peace with his friends? It's hard to say, but in these the early days of Jesus' ministry, anything seems possible.

It's curious though, we may look at this story and be like, really, the first step Jesus takes into being the Messiah publicly is turning a bunch of water into wine? Why is that a big deal? But there's more going on here. In some ways, I actually think Mary has a leg up on Paul, thinking about things long before 1 Corinthians was written. Mary offers Jesus this simple moment to dip his toes into the water of ministry by doing something for the *common good*. This will be a sign done quietly, subtly, with few knowing what actually happened, but it will serve a greater purpose. He will help this family, he will provide for others, and it will be an act of abundant grace and compassion. What better gift to start with?

You also realize when you look at this moment that it serves as a bit of a bookend of Jesus' life and ministry. Mary is present in John's gospel only twice, here, at the beginning, and at the foot of the cross, at the end. Here she prods Jesus to the beginning of his time, there she stands as Jesus' hour truly has come when he would give up his life for all people. Here she witnesses as her son pours out abundant water turned to wine for the good of all people, there she will witness as water mixed with blood will fall from

her son's side as his very life offers up grace upon grace for the sins of the world and the love of all people. Here she will witness as wine serves a simple purpose, there she will hear the disciples speak of wine reflected in Jesus' blood which he said was given for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus' ministry starts and ends with abundant grace and compassion, with water, wine, and blood, all giving us the reminder that our God is a God who provides abundantly, who loves extravagantly, and who views the world with eyes of compassion and grace, seeking to do whatever God can for the good of God's beloved people, us.

But what you might ask does this have to do with us? Well, on the one hand, it reminds us that very often we have a tendency to sound like Jesus. We look at the gifts that we have, the things we could do for others, and we want to say, yeah but now isn't the time or I'm not ready yet. But there is also that voice, that movement of the Holy Spirit nudging saying, the time is always right to do right, calling us to use whatever gifts we have, and we do all have them, for the common good, for the good of our siblings, to put a little more love, grace, and compassion into the world in whatever ways we are capable. And we are capable. Even if we doubt that.

The other thing this says to us lies in the heart of this season after Epiphany, this season when we are supposed to be learning just who Jesus,

God incarnate, Emmanuel, God with us truly is. What this tells us, reminds us, is the simple fact that Jesus, and thus God, is a God of abundance, who turns simple, ordinary things into wonders. God is a God who provides even when all seems lost, even when all seems impossible. Where we see scarcity, God sees the potential for abundance and hope.

God is a God who provides grace upon grace and more often than not that grace comes from the margins and moves into the center. Water jugs shunted off to the side of a room become the source of hope. A man from the outside of society, killed like a common criminal is the source of all hope and forgiveness for all the world. God works from the margins, God works with the impossible, and does wondrous, incredible things, if only we are willing to look to those margins and see what is possible.

Finally, God is a God of abundant love, in its simplest forms, a party continued, a moment of shame turned to honor, and in its most radical forms, a life given for the sake of the whole world. God will move and act in ways we could never expect which should give us an abundance of hope in a world that sometimes gives us the deeply unexpected. And maybe, just maybe, it's also a reminder that at the end of the day, when we want to remember who God is, see who God is, and use our gifts to their fullest potential...we all should just listen to our moms. **AMEN!!!**