

WHEN THE BALL DROPS: Life-Giving Relationship with Others

John 2:1-11

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WATCH/LISTEN: fbcjc.org/sermon/when-the-ball-drops-life-giving-relationships-with-others/

I.

The news has been dominated these past two weeks by devastating wildfires in California. Over 40,000 acres have burned. At least 27 lives have been lost with 31 reported missing, thousands of homes reduced to ash, and tens of thousands displaced. Economic losses exceed \$250 billion. Behind these staggering numbers are real people: families grieving loved ones and homes, communities struggling to rebuild, and neighbors offering support and shelter.

Disasters often remind us of what truly matters. They reveal our interconnectedness and our deep need for community. When faced with overwhelming loss, people come together, sharing resources, offering prayers, and rebuilding lives. This reflects God's design for us: we are made for life-giving relationships with one another. We need one another.

Here at First Baptist Church, Jefferson City, we understand the devastation caused by fire. Forty years ago this May, an electrical fire significantly damaged our newly renovated sanctuary. Some of you remember the smell of charred wood, the ache of loss, and the resilience of this community as we rebuilt together.

But we cannot fully grasp what it would be like if fires consumed entire neighborhoods. Imagine flames carried by winds into nearby cities, saturating the air with harmful smoke and leaving communities shattered. What does a church do when fires threaten not just buildings but lives?

As the Eaton fire threatened Pasadena, the First Baptist Church of Pasadena became a spiritual and physical sanctuary. Led by Pastor John Jay Alvaro, an evacuee himself, the church quickly transformed into a command center, providing shelter for nearly 40 families and coordinating relief efforts. When much of north Pasadena was devastated, the congregation gathered to worship, pray, and support one another. Despite their losses, they are living out their identity as a community centered on Christ and each other, focusing on what truly matters—relationships and faith.

On Tuesday, the church board met to restructure the staff, budget, and long-range planning in light of the destruction. The journey they are walking is not what they expected. Still, they are walking it together, focused on what truly matters—community and relationships centered around Christ – even in the face of loss.

Pastor Alvaro said, "In a church like ours, the people are the gift God is giving to the world, and as leaders, we simply structured a liturgy to turn one another toward each other."ⁱ

Church, you are the gift God is giving to the world. Our calling is to build relationships, foster community, and share God's abundance.

II.

God's design for life-giving relationships is woven into the fabric of Scripture. We see this in the story of Jesus at the wedding in Cana. A community gathers to celebrate a joyous occasion, but the wine runs out—a social disaster in that culture.

Jesus' mother notices the need and brings it to Jesus. Though he hesitates, her faith in who Jesus is persists. Without an answer from Jesus, she tells the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

Jesus instructs the servants to fill six stone jars with water. When the water is drawn out, it has become the finest wine—120 gallons of abundance, far beyond expectation in amount and quality. The best wine of the night.

This miracle wasn't a miracle of physical healing, casting demons, or defying death. It wasn't just a miracle of provision; it revealed the heart of God—a God abundant in grace, delighting in people and relationships. These moments of joyful abundance mirror the coming reign of God: a place of connection, celebration, and deep community.

III.

In times of devastation, like the wildfires in California or the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the story of Cana can feel jarring – yet it is the assigned lectionary event after both events. After the Haiti earthquake, which killed over 223,000, Pastor

Nadia Bolz-Weber reflected, “When I realized [the suggested text] was the wedding at Cana, I thought, great. Jesus at a big party, making sure the wine flows freely. No one wants to hear that today. . . . Nobody wants to hear a quaint little miracle story about how generous God is when the poorest country in this hemisphere lies in even greater waste. Nobody wants to hear of an abundance of wine when people on the streets of Haiti are thirsty.”ⁱⁱ

People in California might feel similarly if their pastors preach this recommended text today. “Why talk about an abundance of wine when we’d give anything for more water to extinguish the fires?” We, too, might struggle to hear about abundance when we feel short on finances, health, patience, or hope.

Yet, the peasant village of Cana likely knew scarcity. Perhaps it wasn't a surprise that the wine, one of the staples of a wedding banquet, had run out in Cana. But among those who had no reason to believe there would ever be enough, Jesus provides a sign of profound abundance. Jesus’ miracle wasn’t just about providing; it was about revealing the abundance of God’s grace—grace meant to overflow and be shared with others.

IV.

Today, we face a different kind of scarcity: a scarcity of meaningful, life-giving relationships. Studiesⁱⁱⁱ show that in-person socializing has dropped by over 20% since 2003, with unmarried men and people under 25 experiencing declines exceeding 35%. Helping or caring for others outside the nuclear family has declined by more than a third. Instead of feeling a natural desire to connect, many retreat into isolation, substituting online interactions for real connections. In a healthy world, people who spend lots of time alone would feel that ancient biological cue: “I’m alone and sad; I should make some plans.” But we live in a sideways world, where easy home entertainment, oversharing online, and stunted social skills lead us to respond: “I’m alone, anxious, and exhausted; thank God my plans were canceled.”

All of this time alone, at home, or on the phone is not just affecting us as individuals. Our growing isolation weakens society, harms our social skills, and reduces community involvement. As more people choose solitude, it reshapes our

shared identity and impacts our happiness, relationships, politics, and how we see the world.

This runs counter to God's design. Our relational God created us for relationships. The church is uniquely positioned to address this crisis by being a place of connection and belonging. Part of our work is to turn people toward one another and lead them into life-giving relationships with Christ and each other.

The miracle at Cana reminds us that God often works through people to bring about transformation:

Mary noticed the need and brought it to Jesus.

The servants responded with simple acts of obedience.

The disciples witnessed the miracle and believed, trusting in what was yet to come.

As a church, how can we notice, act, and trust in ways that make God's love tangible in our community? Relationships grow when we share life together. Community deepens when we spend time face-to-face. Transformation happens through simple acts of faithfulness. It's not always easy, but God designed us for relationships, and it's in community that we experience the abundance of God's kingdom.

V.

Tomorrow, as we honor the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., we are reminded of his vision of the Beloved Community: a world where love and justice prevail, where peace and equality overflow, and where all people live in harmony. Like the wine at Cana, Dr. King envisioned a world where what seemed scarce would overflow in abundance. Like Mary at Cana, he paid attention to the needs of his community and urged others not to be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.

The wedding story in Cana reminds us that God is present when the wine has run out. If, like Mary, like Dr. King, like FBC Pasadena, we pay attention to the needs around us and do what Jesus says to do, we have the potential, as the body of Christ empowered by the Holy Spirit, to become the outpouring of God's generous love and grace in the world.

Whether a church opening its doors during wildfires or a movement crying out for justice, God works through people to bring hope and healing into the world.

The wedding at Cana is more than a wine story; it's a glimpse of God's kingdom—now and not yet where scarcity is replaced by abundance, isolation by connection, and sorrow by celebration. Church, you are part of this story. As Pastor Alvaro said, “The people are the gift God is giving to the world.”

You are the gift. When you notice the needs around you, do what Jesus tells you to do, and trust in God's power to transform, you become vessels of God's extravagant love and grace. So this week, turn toward one another. Share God's abundance. Be the overflowing wine of joy, compassion, justice, and connection in a world desperate for hope.

Go, and be the gift—for the glory of God and the good of the world. Amen.

Melissa Hatfield © 2025

All scripture quoted is from the NRSVUE unless otherwise noted.

ⁱ <https://baptistnews.com/article/when-our-church-was-tested-by-fire/>

ⁱⁱ <https://canadianmennonite.org/abundance-times-need/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2025/02/american-loneliness-personality-politics/681091/>