

**DO WHAT HE TELLS YOU**  
*Sermon for Epiphany 2C: Jn2:1-11*  
LPC, 1/17/10

Over the years I have been privileged to accompany a few other people in their discernment of some pretty important questions. These questions are things like “What program of study should I pursue?” “Should I take this job opportunity?” or “Should I get out of my job?” “Should I end this relationship?” or, alternatively, “Do I allow this relationship to go forward?” “Should I firmly uphold principle, or be lenient, considering the circumstances?” “Do I pursue this course of medical treatment or allow nature to take its course?” “Should I do this thing that is really, really hard for me?”

When a decision is finally reached, I always have the feeling that the people knew the answer all along – it was somewhere inside of them – but they just had to find it. I have also had this impression when making great decisions in my own life. The solution was in me all the time, like a compass in a great ship pointing in the right direction. But just as it takes time to steer a heavy vessel, it sometimes takes time to bring one’s conscious mind into alignment with one’s inner wisdom.

Could this be what is happening to Jesus in today’s story from the Gospel of John?

This is certainly a strange little story. Jesus, his mother and his disciples are at a wedding. Historical studies tell us that wedding celebrations in this time and place were week-long affairs and that for the family to run short of provisions for their guests was disgraceful. But this is exactly what happens to Jesus’ hosts. They are running out of wine. In this, they are in danger of losing face, big-time.

Jesus’ mother Mary tells him of the shortfall, clearly expecting him to do something about it. This implies that Mary knows about Jesus’ identity as God’s messiah, his calling to ministry, and his extraordinary powers.

Jesus, according to John, knows these things about himself, too. In fact, in no other Gospel is Jesus so clear about his identity as the Son of God, with all that that implies. But, for all that, Jesus seems startled and puzzled by Mary’s implication that he do something about the wine shortage: “Woman, what concern is that to you and me? My hour has not yet come.”

Still, Mary’s suggestion works on him. We’re not told how long this takes, but Jesus does decide to take action. Under his direction huge water jars are filled with water, and when the liquid is drawn out, it is fine wine.

Jesus seems to be experiencing, in this case, the same phenomenon I have observed in myself and others. Jesus had the capacity for this “sign” (as John calls it) in him all the time, he just had to come round to it himself.

This passage also contains some elements that may be helpful to us when we are in the throes of some great decision, attempting to discern the deep wisdom that already exists within us. These helpful bits can be found, first, in the words of Mary, Jesus' mother, and secondly, in the manner in which Jesus performs this sign of turning water into wine.

Notice that Mary is undeterred by Jesus' off-putting words: "What is that to you and me?" She knows, before he does, that he's going to do something powerful about the situation. She tells the servants, "Do what he tells you," confident he's going to tell them something useful.

For those of us who have been Christian awhile, this is very useful advice when we are making big decisions. Do what Jesus says. Although Jesus clearly hasn't not addressed, in his recorded remarks, the particular job, relationship or situation in which I find myself today, Jesus has said a lot of things that apply to almost any situation. We *know* what Jesus says, if we've attended church, or read the Bible at all.

Jesus says, "Be faithful. Forgive others. Do not judge. Have compassion. Love one another. Trust God." When these sayings are heeded, the right decision is halfway made.

Besides Jesus' sayings to guide our decisions, we have Jesus' actions, and the way he performs those actions. The way Jesus performs the sign of turning water into wine is a case in point.

That the water has turned into wine is amazing in itself. But there's some else amazing. The other amazing thing is the sheer volume of wine. At least one hundred twenty gallons of it! Jesus has been extravagantly, ridiculously, mind-blowingly generous in the performance of this sign. Moreover he has replaced a symbol of repentance and atonement (the water of purification), with a symbol of celebration (the wine). With this symbolism, I believe John, at the beginning of his Gospel, is prefiguring the end of his Gospel, where Jesus' atonement and sacrifice turns into the celebration of his resurrection.

Maybe the final word in making hard decisions is to be generous, as Jesus was, and is, generous with his grace. Generous with others, generous to ourselves, generous back to God. In the final analysis, as long as we're not breaking any commandments, *what* we decide to do is probably of secondary importance to *how* we do it. And Jesus has shown us how: with faith, forgiveness, non-judgment, compassion and trust. And great, great generosity.

What to do? Do what he tells you.